METAL HAMMER
THE 100 SONGS THAT CHANGED OUR WORLD
METALLICA
INSIDE THE INVENTION OF THRASH
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WHY ONE DELICIOUS SONG CHANGED EVERYTHING
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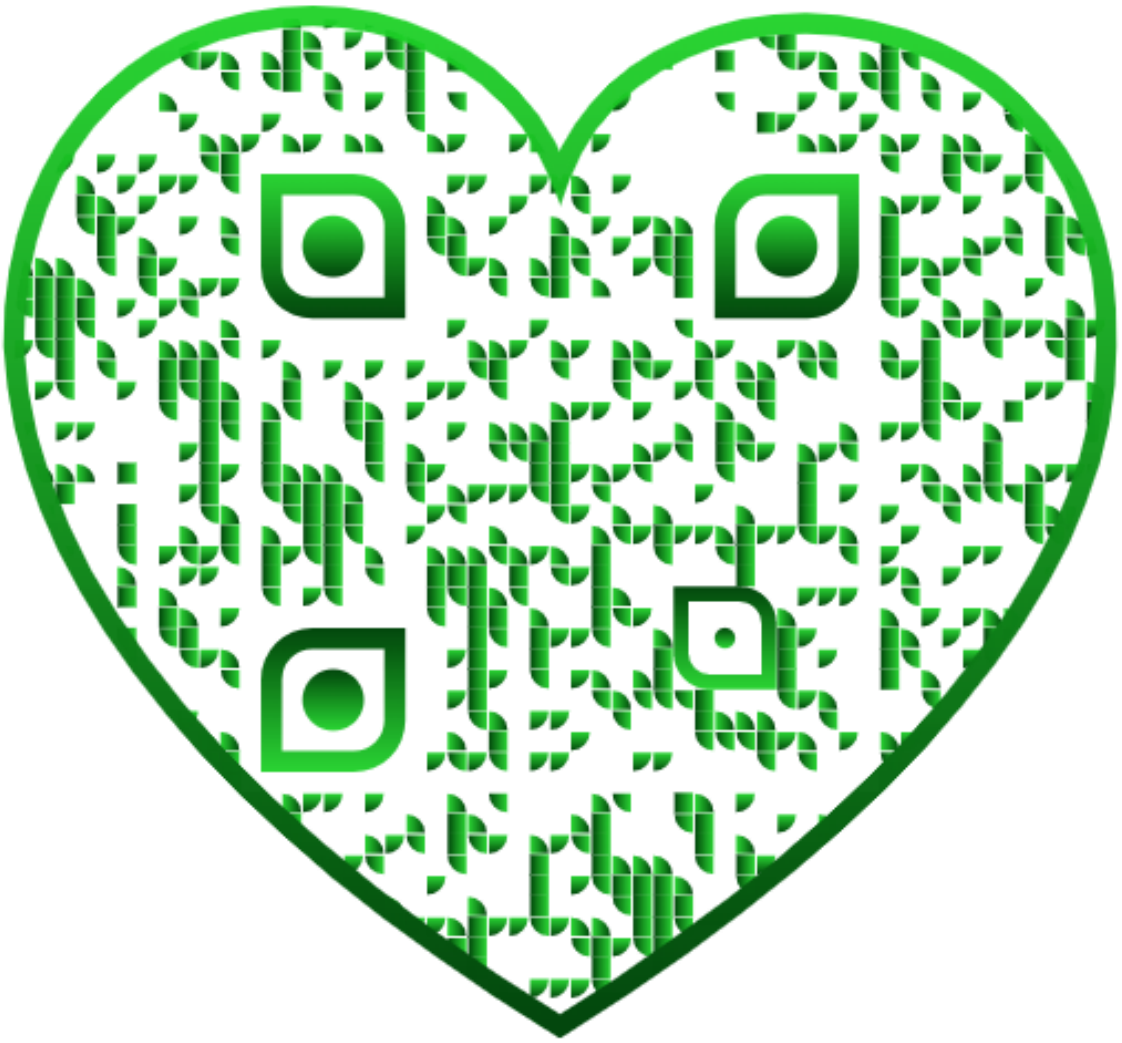
FUTURE
ISSUE 388



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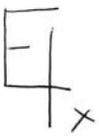
100 SONGS. A LIFETIME OF METAL

AFTER WE DECIDED on the theme for this month's issue – The 100 Songs That Changed Our World – we had a *lot* of 'spirited' team meetings to decide on the entries that would end up on the list. Early on, we set a couple of boundaries: Black Sabbath would be the starting point – ground zero for metal proper – and we'd only allow one track per band.

Sifting through everyone's suggestions was a monumental task, and we had to keep asking ourselves: 'did this song *really* change metal?' What you hold in your hands is our best answer to that question. From thrash metal, to black metal, to nu metal and beyond, these are the songs that have not only shaped the sound and culture of our beloved scene, but have been the soundtrack to our lives – either directly, or indirectly via their colossal influence on other bands. Agree or disagree with our picks? Get in touch via the contacts on the right…

This issue isn't just a celebration of everything we love, though – it's a chronological path through it. In particular, the 70s–90s period is the guide I wish I'd had when I was discovering metal back in the 00s. I'd like to think someone could pick up this magazine and fall more in love with our world too.

Stay metal,



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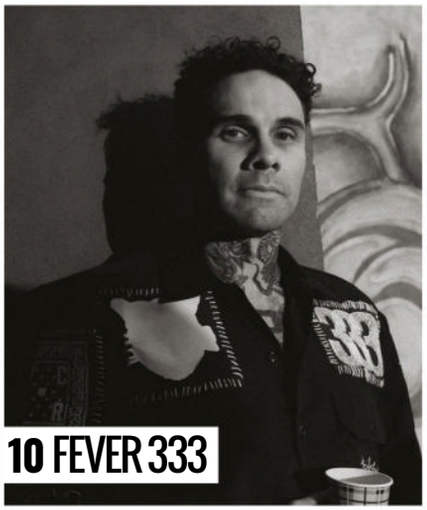
MEET THE BAND

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
The Ultimate Master Of List Features, and someone who's spent many years writing and editing pieces on the diverse bands you see on these pages, Dave brought all his expertise to bear when it came to helming our 100-song spectacular.

SAM WILLIAMS
DESIGNER
Sam at design studio Magic Torch is a gentleman and a legend, who literally brings the magic to our special multi-person covers. Just look at how incredible this one is! Eternal hails, sir. You're doing the (dark) lord's work.

STEPHANIE CABRAL
PHOTOGRAPHER
Based in LA, our Steph is a killer photographer. This month, she captured Bruce Dickinson during his 'secret' show at the legendary Whisky A Go Go. The pictures made us happier than she looks in her own signature 'tongue-out' selfies.

29 BLACK SABBATH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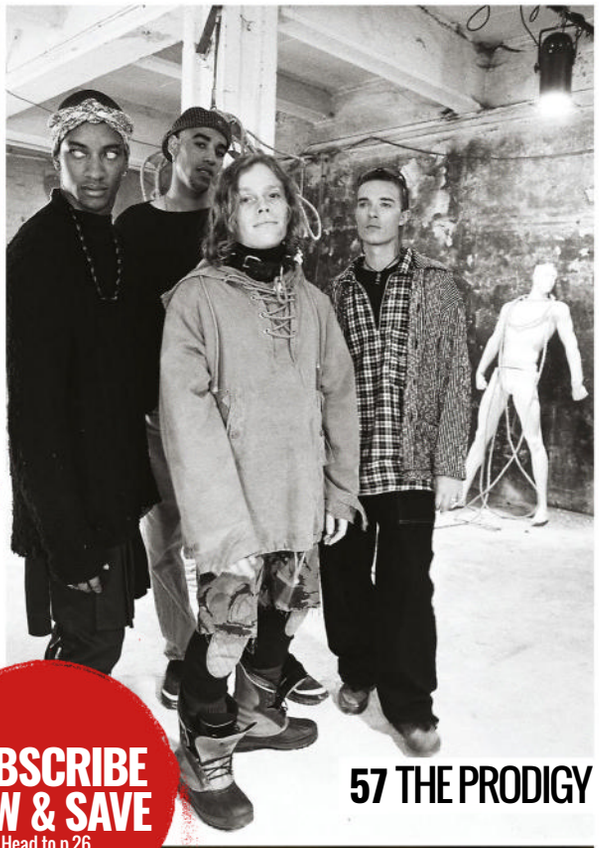

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JONATAHN WEINER

THE BIG PICTURE

PARTY LIKE IT'S 1999

SLIPKNOT ARE BACK! After teasing their return with a mysterious billboard and website – youcantkillme.com – Iowa's finest played a surprise, incredibly intimate show at the 300-capacity Pappy & Harriet's Place in Pioneertown, California ahead of their scheduled return to the stage at the second Sick New World festival in Las Vegas.

Almost five months since their last show – and the surprise departure of drummer Jay Weinberg, who had played with the band since 2014 – the Nine roared back to life with a set that clearly signalled their plans to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their self-titled debut album this year.

Donning the iconic red boilersuits they wore around that record, the band also debuted new masks, albeit with a vintage twist, as some riffed on the original 1999 designs. It wasn't just the masks that were different, either – the show marked the debut of their latest drummer, since confirmed to be former Sepultura man Eloy Casagrande.

Although the show kicked off celebrations for Slipknot's 25th anniversary, the 15-song set was a career-spanning affair.

"We are gonna play you some songs from beyond that year," admitted frontman Corey Taylor. "But goddamn it, it all started in '99 and it's starting again here tonight."

THE HOT TOPIC

PARENTAL ADVISORY: EXPLICIT MATERIAL

New music documentary *Cover Your Ears* drafts in members of Twisted Sister, Judas Priest and Rotting Christ to discuss music's relationship with censorship

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

Dee Snider, Chuck D and Matt Maguire (aka Gwar's Sawborg Destructo) make their voices heard in *Cover Your Ears*

COVER YOUR EARS is a new documentary bringing together luminaries such as Dee Snider, Jello Biafra, Chuck D, Judas Priest's Ian Hill and Sakis Tolis from Rotting Christ to explore how censorship has affected music over the decades. Canadian director/co-writer Sean Patrick Shaul's original focus was the 'dirty blues' of the 1920s-50s, those pioneering naughty ditties that inspired AC/DC's love of lewd innuendo. But the deeper Sean dug, the more he discovered how much censorship has shaped our favourite music.

"We realised there's a direct correlation between the dirty blues and The Rolling Stones, and a direct correlation between the Stones and heavy metal," he says. "So the story just kind of unravelled itself."

Among others, the film examines the concerns of the Parents' Music Resource Centre, a 1980s pressure group headed by Tipper Gore who went to war with anything they perceived as being anti-family values. At its peak, bands like Judas Priest and Twisted Sister were dragged into court and even in front of the senate, accused of everything from promoting sexual immorality to including subliminal messages in their songs urging fans to harm themselves.

Today, their fears seem quaint in a world where Cardi B's liquescent fanny tops the charts and scoops awards. Are censors less troubled by music nowadays?

"They're still troubled, but they are lost in the noise of everyone being troubled by everything now," ponders Sean.

"At that time it was on the rise with MTV – these videos were broadcast into your house on cable, so parents weren't exposed to what W.A.S.P. were up to until suddenly it's in your living room. Music still upsets people, but the game's different now. It's impossible to ban something because you can always find it somewhere."

To some extent, the phenomenon has shifted from top-down authoritarian stricture to a more insidious censoriousness, where artists are shut down by anonymous activists rather than government agents.

"We didn't have the term 'cancel culture' before – I personally hate that term, but that's what censorship is now 90% of the time," reckons Sean. "Before it would be picket signs outside a venue – 'Down With Satan' or whatever. Now those people don't leave the house, they band together online, contact venues, labels and streaming services and try to get bands pulled. Which makes it harder to fight against; there's no one you can point to, it's these faceless avatars who can cause a huge amount of damage to an artist's career. For better or worse."

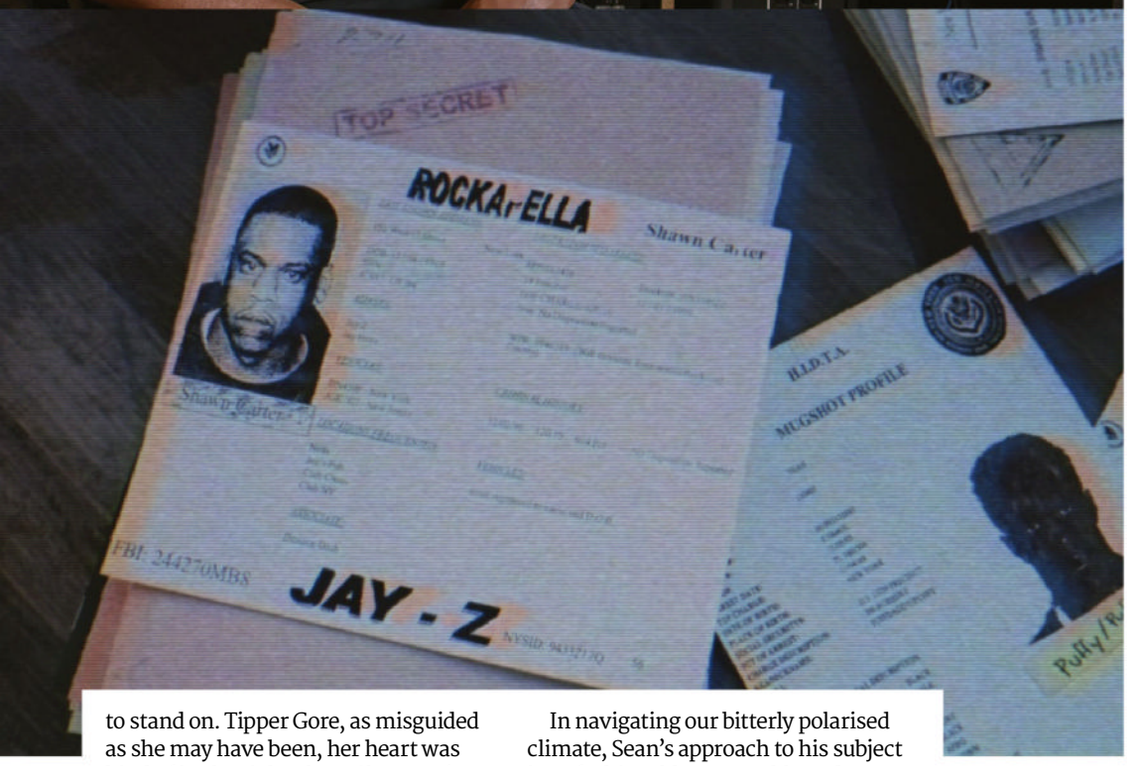
Sean is quick to add, "But some artists *should* be called out on their shit. Freedom of speech works both ways – you have to deal with the reaction to what you've said. It's tough for me to defend some of those people, but fair's fair."

In recounting its tale, the film is scrupulously nuanced and balanced, refusing to judge or dictate. "It was very important to us to not just wag our fingers at these uptight, pearl-clutching old ladies," Sean affirms. "It seemed too easy to do that. It was more about understanding why these people were upset, and whether they had a leg

"PARENTS WEREN'T EXPOSED TO W.A.S.P. UNTIL SUDDENLY THEY'RE IN YOUR LIVING ROOM"

SEAN PATRICK SHAUL

PRESS



to stand on. Tipper Gore, as misguided as she may have been, her heart was kind of in the right place. She wasn't saying, 'These artists can't make this art', she was saying, 'Let's label it so parents know what their kids are listening to.' The older I get, the more I'm like, 'That kinda makes sense.'"

Approaching the topic with an open mind, Sean found his own attitudes softening as a result of the filmmaking process.

"I went into this as a free speech absolutist – 'You've got to take the bad with the good, anything goes'," he admits. "But after diving in over a couple of years, well, I think I've got a line, too. There's stuff that I agree shouldn't be widely distributed to any age group, at any time, on any platform… but who am I to decide? Who is the government or the artist to decide? I guess 100 years later, we are still trying to figure out how to regulate that."

In navigating our bitterly polarised climate, Sean's approach to his subject is unfashionably reasonable and measured – qualities we'll need if we're to move beyond culture war zealotry and derangement.

"With internet culture now, people are afraid to voice an opinion either way, or even question things," says Sean. "Everything gets boiled down to a headline or a tweet, so it's hard to ask complex questions and look at things critically. We knew before we shot one frame that this movie wasn't going to answer a lot of questions. It's so complex, it's a grey area full of loopholes. Our goal was to raise a load more questions and make people think about things they hadn't thought about." H

***COVER YOUR EARS* IS OUT NOW AND AVAILABLE TO RENT/ STREAM ON AMAZON PRIME AND APPLETV+**

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

KERRY KING
From Hell I Rise
"A bold statement of intent that absolutely slays"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

KATI RÁN
Sála
"Deeply soulful, far-reaching Nordic folk that's the sonic equivalent of mithril"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

KERRY KING
From Hell I Rise
"He's baaaaaaack! Oh hell yes"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

GHOST
Prequelle
"I got very excited about *Rite Here Rite Now* coming out and had to sit down with an old friend"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

KERRY KING
From Hell I Rise
"Hail to the King, baby"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

ARKA'N ASRAFOKOR
Dzikkuh
"Proof that Africa is home to metal's next wave of great bands"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

DOES METAL NEED MORE FASHION SENSE?

Fever 333's Jason Aalon Butler answers your questions on style, giant chickens, and the time he got told off by Metallica's tech crew

WORDS: JACK ROGERS

THERE ARE FEW people who can match the energy of Jason Aalon Butler. He's long mixed music with activism, making impassioned speeches from stages and sporadically climbing all over venues. As Fever 333 gear up for a new album, we decided to ask him your tough questions. And, as *Hammer* went to press, Jason's former band Letlive announced a surprise farewell tour for 2025 – proving you can never predict what he'll do next.

Do you plan your stage stunts, or is it a moment of inspiration/madness?
Sarahisapixie, Instagram
"Definitely the latter. I've never planned them, because if I overthink them, the excitement of the feat will dissipate as the show goes on. It would also come off as contrived. It would look more like [circus] Barnum & Bailey than a punk rock show. That's the opposite of what I want."

***Hammer*: Have you ever had a moment where you thought, 'I've gone too far'?**
"Only twice. I stupidly put my hand through a window while playing in Lubbock, Texas. I duct-taped a piece of merch to my arm because there was an actual shard of glass through it, severing my median nerve and flexor tendon. Another time, at the Showbox theatre in Seattle, I planned to swing from a rafter across the barricade onto the stage. I made it right to the edge of the stage. If I hadn't done, it would have been a shitty fall."

Do you ever regret not carrying on under the Letlive banner?
Bonnie Earle, email
"With Letlive, it was a moment in time. I often feel like it was *ahead* of its time. The amount of people who talk to me about coming back and doing a show does not reflect the adoration or support we were getting back then. You don't know what you have until it's gone, as they say. That being the case, it was important for Letlive to be that moment in time, simply for the artists who were influenced by it. It was an emotional exercise."

As an activist for Black communities within rock music, who would you say has influenced Black culture within rock?
Collidewiththesky_x Instagram
"As far as rock is concerned, there's the obvious, like Fishbone and Bad Brains. We see these people as the faces, as they've been given screen time and magazine shoutouts. But I actually think that the marginalised young Black people in the hoods and small towns nobody thinks would listen to rock music have the biggest effect. They are taking punk and metal into places that it would never be otherwise. I grew up around a lot of cultural activity that didn't lend itself to hardcore and metal. Because of that, I quadrupled down on how much I loved it and desired to be a part of that scene. You risk a lot being a Black person in these areas, dressing a certain way or having a certain song on your headphones. That in itself is a feat."

***Hammer*: Do you feel more of a responsibility for standing up for those individuals and promoting their efforts now?**
"Absolutely. I'll say it this way. Billionaires owe it to the world to give back and to undo the fucking-up that they've done by becoming billionaires. To become that wealthy, you have to exhaust and exploit. I use that example because you must work similarly when you become a certain type of artist. I've made my career by discussing the perils I've been through from a unique intersection. My lived experience, a shared experience with so many Black folks and vulnerable communities worldwide. It would be fucked up for me not to pay that back to the community and make sure it benefits from me talking about it, so it doesn't turn into exploitation."

Who would be your dream collab for Fever 333?
Commisar_ryan, Instagram
"There's a lot of new, younger rappers I'd love to get involved with. My duty as an artist is to unite worlds. I'd be up for doing something with G Perico, a West Coast rapper from my parts. Getting him on a track that's authentic to him and Fever would be what it's about. Vince Staples would be fun, too, because his intelligence when it comes to the culture is something the scene ▶

PRESS

Jason in a rare moment of not climbing on something

“MY DAD TAUGHT ME I COULD BE JAMES BROWN, IF I WANTED TO BE”

could benefit from. I can't stand people doing something just to get the look. It needs to come from a want to create something new."

Which musician made you think, 'Yeah, I can do this!'?
Alice Setter, email
"My dad [Aalon Butler] was in a position, and still is at age 70-plus, of being one of the most talented people I've ever met and seen perform in my life, no doubt. He was my example growing up, showing me how to be an artist and a man, for better or worse. Seeing him do it was influential and built an archetype for me."

***Hammer*: What was the biggest lesson he taught you?**
"To be super-real. Due to our relationship's sometimes turbulent nature, I always wanted to be better. He was so good that it was always this silent competition. Some of it was vocal. It was all about making sure that I knew I could play *Rock 'N' Roll Gangster*, one of his biggest songs. Making sure that I still had the funk, no matter how crazy and gnarly I got. That I could be James Brown if I wanted to be."

What was the view like from the Download tower last year?
Gareth Jones, Facebook
"I grew up skateboarding, so it was just upping the stair count. It was an incredible view. What I wasn't aware of was that Metallica provided those towers. One of their production dudes spoke with me afterwards. It wasn't an effort to disrespect what they'd built; it was just a moment. It's rock'n'roll, bro!"

Bring Me The Horizon are the most important metal band of the 21st century – yes or no?
Em Collier, email
"It's much more nuanced than just yes or no. Saying that, that band has transformed both themselves and the scene socially and musically so many times. They've encouraged people to be better or look at themselves in a new light. Their ability to ride whatever wave they've created, I don't think people understand how much of a skill and a talent that is. It's not just because they have their finger on the pulse. It's an observation of culture. Being able to navigate through that chaos, especially when you started as a deathcore band, is crazy. I don't know any band that has evolved the way they have."

"METAL NEEDS MORE BOWIES, MORE PRINCES, MORE EAZY-ES"

Jason Aalon Butler: confident he could take down a mega-chicken

Has becoming a parent changed the way you approach political activism?
Ian Shaye, email
"How I understand people's purity has been verified. My grace towards people is much wider than before, because I understand that people make mistakes. One thing becoming a father has confirmed is that we can be better. There is a piece of us that's magic, but that piece can be disrupted and taken over. Now, I look at people differently when they do things, whether I agree with them or not. There needs to be that element of understanding."

Who would star in a biopic of your life?
Anna Deb, email
"Oh, it would be my homie, Brandon. He's in a band called Ain't Shit. People may not know him yet, but they *will* know him. His band is sick, but he also looks like the spitting image of young me. We shot a pilot for a series based on my and my friend's lives, and he was the person we had playing me in it. So I've already found him!"

***Hammer*: Living in LA, have you ever been tempted to work in film?**
"Any agent out there trying to get a mixed, eloquent, emotional older-than-young man involved, I'd do it. I'm fascinated by being able to play different characters but also portray certain stories through my filter. It's an amazing medium, so I'd give it a try."

Does metal need more fashion sense?
Stephen Ward, email
"Metal doesn't need more fashion sense. Metal needs to remember what it means to have style. That differs from fashion. Style is something that you emanate. It's an essence. It's an outward expression of an inward idea. I used to work in fashion, and I understand the purpose. But what we need is more Bowies. More Princes. More Eazy-Es. That's what I believe."

What would you rather fight – a dinosaur-sized chicken or 100 chicken-sized dinosaurs?
Brett Anderson, email
"A dinosaur-sized chicken, for sure. I would fry that bitch. I don't even have to think about it. Imagine 100 chickens and then throw dinosaurs into the mix. We don't understand the power of dinosaurs. We weren't there. It would be much easier to get the better of the chicken regarding their smarts. So, yeah, gotta be the huge chicken." H

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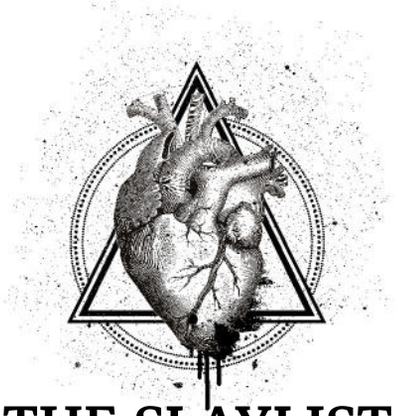


THE SLAYLIST

MICHAEL 'MOOSE' THOMAS

The former Bullet For My Valentine drummer and Kill The Lights founder talks hilariously heavy death metal, classic rock and surprising Oi! punk covers

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

Moose owes it all to Nirvana

"I'LL KICK OFF with my earliest memory of enjoying music. **QUEEN** always remind me of driving in the car with my parents – *Fat Bottomed Girls* in particular brings me back to those times, sitting in the backseat. Later on, Jason [James, ex-BFMV/current Kill The Lights bassist] and I would blast Queen and get drunk on the Bullet tour bus.

"**NIRVANA** really marked my transition from liking music to loving music. In school, everyone listened to bands like Take That or East 17. When my brother brought home a copied cassette of *In Utero*, I remember thinking, 'What the fuck is this?' *Milk It* really stood out to me. It was so intense. It changed my whole life. Without Nirvana, I wouldn't have learned to play guitar, and without playing guitar, I wouldn't have realised I wanted to become a drummer.

"I've had quite a few 'What the fuck is this?' musical moments in my life. My best friend Dave played a key part in a few of them; growing up, every Saturday we'd go to the local record shop. We loved picking random albums and asking to play them through the shop speakers. Once we chose **BLOOD DUSTER**'s *Fisting The Dead* and laughed at how heavy it was. By the time *Vulgar Taste* was blasting throughout the shop, I thought, 'No way, this is not for me.' Now I love it! Dave also played me **PANTERA**'s *Cemetery Gates* for the first time. When the riff hit, I was in awe – it put groove metal on my radar.

LISTEN NOW
To hear Moose's picks, head to tinyurl.com/MooseSlaylist

"MTV helped me discover some great acts. I used to record *Headbangers Ball* on VHS and watch it at my friend's house. **DEFTONES** were on it once, and *7 Words* left us speechless. It was such a different style; the midsection got so chunky and heavy. I also heard **THE OFFSPRING**'s *Self Esteem* for the first time on MTV, and I was hooked. *Smash* was the first record I bought with my own money, and The Offspring triggered my transition into liking punk and underground music.

"Compilation discs also played a huge part in my musical journey. During my Offspring phase, I remember listening to a compilation disc and thinking **VISION OF DISORDER**'s Tim Williams sounded like Dexter Holland. *Zone Zero* was like a nastier hardcore version of The Offspring. I liked it so much that I got my record store to import the album from Australia.

"When I wanted to discover new bands, I used to hound this old-school punk guy from the Welsh Valleys. His name was Sponge, and I'd go round his house and beg him to knock out his vinyls. When he played **ANTI-NOWHERE LEAGUE**, I instantly loved them. We used to cover *Woman* in early Bullet days, because the track just made us all laugh.

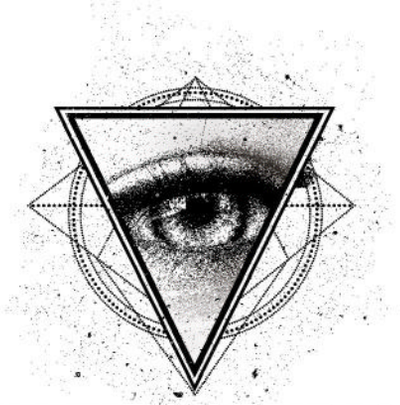
"A huge dream I ticked off during my time with Bullet was working with producer Colin Richardson. When I first heard **MACHINE HEAD**'s *Davidian*, the drums sounded incredible – I wanted my drums to sound that good. We were quite jealous because Funeral For A Friend got a chance to work with him first, but I think everyone my age wanted a piece of Chris. When we worked with him on *The Poison*, it was incredible.

"It was quite intense, those early days. **ALKALINE TRIO**'s *Burn* reminds me of how existential the success made me feel. We'd just got signed, released *The Poison*, and we were touring America. I'd wanted to be a musician since the age of 13, but I'd ticked off my goals so quickly. I didn't even know if I wanted to do it anymore – what else was there? Luckily, I had a word with myself and I made a point of finding new goals. And I'm glad I did – I've had so many amazing experiences since." H

"I TICKED MY GOALS OFF SO QUICKLY, I DIDN'T KNOW IF I WANTED TO PLAY MUSIC ANYMORE"

KILL THE LIGHTS' NEW ALBUM, *DEATH MELODIES*, IS OUT NOW VIA FEARLESS

PRESS



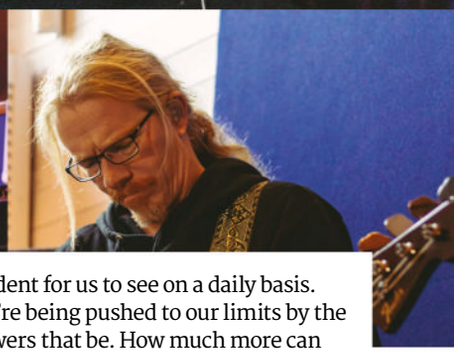
IN THE STUDIO

ORANGE GOBLIN

They might have signed to a legendary doom label, but they're embracing optimism on album 10

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Ben is far too happy to be on the same label as Paradise Lost, but we'll let it slide



STONER METAL STALWARTS

Orange Goblin have been around for almost 30 years. Let that sink it: three decades of greased-up rock'n'roll riffs à la Motörhead mixed in with the monolithic riffs of Black Sabbath, delivered with a triumphant air of heavy metal thunder that helped put British stoner on the map when the US looked set to corner the market with Sleep, Kyuss and Monster Magnet.

These days you're as likely to find OG vocalist Ben Ward nurturing the next generation of metal talent with his Route One booking agency as you are to see him onstage showing the young whipper-snappers how it's done. But as the band prepare for album #10, Ben tells *Hammer* they aren't about to settle for the cushy desk life any time soon.

You'd been signed to Candlelight since 2012's *A Eulogy For The Damned*. What prompted a move to Peaceville?

"We were underwhelmed with how [2018's] *The Wolf Bites Back* was promoted and marketed. We don't feel it got the respect it deserved. Thankfully, Peaceville stepped right in. We grew up heavily influenced by a lot of Peaceville bands, especially in those early days where they'd got Anathema, My Dying Bride and Paradise Lost. It felt like a no-brainer, really!"

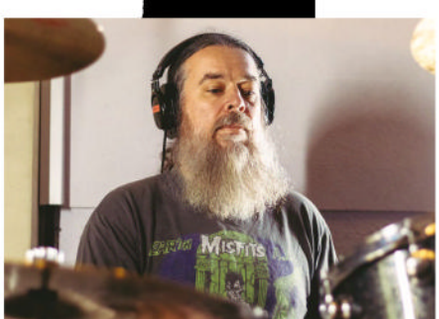
THE FACTS

ALBUM: 10

PRODUCER: Mike Exeter

STUDIO: Woodworm Studios, Oxfordshire, UK

EXPECT: Gravel-gargling rock'n'roll with riffs for days



So are Orange Goblin going full doom?

"Since *Eulogy*... we've tried to develop our own style encapsulating everything we like, but our two main influences have always been Black Sabbath and Motörhead, and we've maintained that core for this album. But there are some progressive elements in there: blues, psychedelia... a natural continuation."

What are the lyrical concepts?

"I take inspiration from what's going on around me, as well as the literature I'm reading at the time, whether that's Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick or something else entirely. I've been fascinated by the Covid conspiracy theories and that comes up on the song *False Hope Diet*. I got slim and sober, and that's had an effect on my mindset as it's given me more positivity, as opposed to always being doom and gloom. I spent a lot of time listening to lyricists I admire, like Geezer Butler, Roger Waters, Dave Wyndorf and Neil Fallon... these great storytellers. I wanted to have a bit of fun with that – take a concept and really explore it."

Do you ever get a moment of 'Wait, I've read about this...' when real-world events line up like a piece of dystopian fiction?

"Well, a perfect example is *1984* by George Orwell! He predicted stuff that is now evident for us to see on a daily basis. We're being pushed to our limits by the powers that be. How much more can we take? The majority of us live under a government that hardly any of us want, and none of us voted for. There's no justice in the world, but it's great conceptual material for a metal album!"

Orange Goblin's 30th anniversary is next year. How crazy is that?!

"We've been doing this band over half our lives. I've travelled the world, experienced different cultures and had the time of my life. The day it becomes a chore, it's time to pack up. But with this new album under our belts, we're more rejuvenated than ever."

That's good to hear, considering you've described the last track *End Of Transmission* as "maybe the last song we'll ever write"...

"You never know! *End Of Transmission* ties in nicely to our first album, *Frequencies From Planet Ten*, like we've come full-circle. When a band gets to this age, you never know if someone is going to drop dead! Hopefully it's *not* the end, but if it is then we're going out on a good one." H

***SCIENCE, NOT FICTION* IS DUE ON JULY 19 VIA PEACEVILLE. ORANGE GOBLIN PLAY MYSTIC FESTIVAL IN JUNE AND TOUR THE UK IN OCTOBER**

PRESS

LIFE LESSONS

GLEN BENTON

The Deicide frontman might be a naughty boy, but that doesn't mean he hasn't learned things along the way – this is his wisdom

WORDS: PERRAN HELYES • PICTURES: GENE SMIRNOV

GLEN BENTON IS the face of Satanic death metal. Literally… having branded an inverted cross on his forehead in his early days of fronting Tampa's Deicide. Across his 35-year crusade, Glen has riled up countless Christians, but also animal rights activists – after he shot a squirrel during an interview with the NME in 1992, he received death threats, and a show in Stockholm was bombed. A few years later, Republican senator Bob Dole condemned the Florida death metal scene for threatening to "undermine our character as a nation".

Glen's also a 56-year-old father of two, and speaks of the myriad scrapes he's ended up in with the flippancy of a man who has learned not to take things too seriously.

BE WHO YOU'RE BORN TO BE

"I was always referred to as 'the evil little bastard' in my family. I just fell into it, and it's the persona I've had ever since I was a little kid, through school and through everything else. I don't even really know why, but do I get off on raising eyebrows and ruffling feathers? Fuck yeah, I do! Fifty-six years old and I still love getting a reaction out of folks Most kids rebel, and I wanted to fight the powers."

YOU DON'T NEED DOGMA TO BE A GOOD PERSON

"Religion is a three-legged dog, and it's on its way out. I think people know how to treat each other, and don't need a book full of bullshit to tell them how to do it. I think we're all learning as a species to not step on each other's toes and who are the toe-steppers. We all know who the players in the game are."

USE WHAT YOU KNOW

"When I was eight years old and forced against my will to participate in the Christmas play at the church my mother was a Sunday school teacher at, I was singing at the front of the church thinking, 'How did I get myself into this shit?' My father's side of the family were Catholic and my mother's Lutheran, so I got the worst of both worlds. It's beaten into me, so I can't sing about anything else. If I try to sing about other things, I draw a complete blank. I let the universe speak through me, and if I have to force it, it just won't come."

THE 80S FLORIDA METAL SCENE WAS AN ARMS RACE

"Back then, we were all trying to define our own sounds and images. I don't wanna say there was unfriendly competition, but I don't wanna say there was *friendly* competition either. We were all competing for the front seat. It all started with Savatage and Nasty Savage. You had the California thrash thing going on with Possessed and we wanted to outdo that. My goal was to be heavier, vocally especially."

KNOW WHEN TO QUIT

"I didn't think playing shows with rotting meat as part of our set-up was gonna cause that much of a shitstorm. Within three shows of that stuff I had the authorities bearing down on me, so it was a very short-lived moment in Deicide history."

IMPULSES CAN BE HONEST

"I think I was only 22 when I burned the inverted cross into my forehead. The spirit moved me, man! To this day, I don't know what the fuck I was thinking, but I knew that I had been christened Catholic as a child, and I felt that the best way to take care of that would be my symbolic way of taking that Catholic mark off of my skin. I've always been that kid in the picture who's got that twisted look and the smile on his face, and when I got to an age where I could start being me, I just started being me. Now that my two sons are both grown and off in the world, I find myself back to being that guy again, the guy that branded the cross on his forehead."

BALANCING MUSIC WITH FATHERHOOD IS TOUGH

"I don't think people realise, because I don't speak too much about my personal life, but all the things in the past where we have had to cancel tours and people have pointed their fingers, these were all done in the name of my kids. When I had to get custody of my youngest son he was stolen from me and taken out of state, and I had to go get him and bring him home. I was a single guy raising him by myself and a lot of people don't understand this shit, on top of being who I am and doing what I do."

KEEP IT SIMPLE

"I learned that the most simplistic ideas are some of the greatest, and that simplicity is the key to rock'n'roll. People want to be entertained, and I want to write music that people can kick the shit out of each other to, not where you have to sit there and figure it all out. We're not Pink Floyd, for god's sake."

PREPARE TO BE SENSATIONALISED

"Senator Bob Dole made mention of us, and I came home from the supermarket and there was a news truck sitting on my front yard. They wanted my reaction to Bob Dole's reaction to somebody else's fucking reaction, and I told them to get the fuck off my property."

NOT ALL PRESS IS GOOD PRESS

"[A bomb went off at our show in Stockholm in 1992], but I've blown up bigger shit in my backyard, and there was overreaction from the authorities and the press that meant I didn't get to do my gig. The fans got the end of the poop stick on that one."

FIND YOUR FAMILY, AND YOUR SENSE OF HUMOUR

"[Drummer] Steve Asheim has been in this band with me for nearly 40 years, and we have smoked a lot of weed together, that's for sure. I was going through my pictures the other day and I found this one of Steve maybe a year after we met, when he was 16 years old and I was 18. We know how to make each other laugh, we yell at the television together when we're on tour. We're a couple of old angry yard gnomes. Steve was always the mediator back in the day, and I felt bad for him because he was always put in the middle of the horseshit that ▶

"I WAS ALWAYS REFERRED TO AS THE EVIL LITTLE BASTARD IN MY FAMILY"

PRESS/GENE SMIRNOV

Glen Benton: "angry yard gnome", hated by Christians

"I DON'T LIKE TO WATCH THE NEWS BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE I'M BEING STABBED TO DEATH"

we had to put up with back then. Now he doesn't have to, because we've made this a very harmonious thing where there's not a negative word or anyone feeling hurt. If you can't laugh at this shit, you will throw yourself off a building."

I WON'T BACK DOWN ON RELIGION JUST TO APPEASE PEOPLE

"I think what's important is just being true to one's self and finishing what you started. I'm not gonna bail out of who and what I am just to placate people who can't enjoy it for what it is. I'm not singing about what *you* should believe in, it's about me. It's not your agony, it's not your pain, and I can't defend my sickness. Enjoy it if you want to. The great thing about this world is we can change the channel. I don't like to watch the news because I feel like I'm being stabbed to the death, so I don't watch the news! It's fucking simple. If you don't like Deicide, do me a favour: turn it off."

THE HEAT WILL MOVE OFF YOU

"I thought there was a real parenting problem going on in Norway [when the church burnings and murders happened in the black metal scene], but in the United States those guys didn't equal an empty pickle jar. As far as the religious right here in the States goes, Marilyn Manson took those off my back."

METAL NEEDS ITS CHARACTERS

"I was a huge Ronnie James Dio fan, as well as an Ozzy one. The business right now really needs people with personalities. All the greats are dying off and we need more people who can go out there and shake people up. There was a moment when there was too much music to be consumed, and there's so much out there that really you can't separate anything. That's why I'm saying you need those guys, your Ozzys and Rob Halfords and Lemmys who are not afraid to be out there."

GIVING A SHIT IS OVERRATED

"When you get to my age, you really get this really strong, profound 'I don't give a fuck about anything' energy. I don't chase other people's happiness. I've already raised two kids who are off in the world, so now the fucking ATM is closed, and I'm back to being ruthless Glen again. My parents are dead, everybody in my family is dead, the moral police don't give a fuck about me anymore, so I have no one to answer to. I am an evil empty nester."

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THE STORY BEHIND

NYMPHETAMINE
CRADLE OF FILTH

The gothic ode to love, lust and addiction that sparked commercial success and a Grammy nomination

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

BY THE TIME they released their sixth studio album, 2004's *Nymphetamine*, Cradle Of Filth were loved and loathed in equal measure. Having partially shed their black metal skins, they'd embraced a more grandiose and symphonic style, dragging extreme metal as close to the mainstream as it could get at that point. They'd even – gasp! – signed to a major label for preceding album *Damnation And A Day*, which came out on Sony in 2003.

Nymphetamine the record featured two versions of its title track. *Nymphetamine (Overdose)* was a multi-part, nine-minute epic sitting as the centrepiece of the record. But it was a shortened version, dubbed *Nymphetamine (Fix)*, that was sent forth as a single, taking on its own life, propelling the band to even greater levels of infamy and landing them their biggest-selling album to this day. It even got nominated for a Grammy.

"The negativity had already hit us in a tsunami by that point," laughs frontman Dani Filth. "When we signed with Sony, of course we were labelled sellouts. We were the Backstreet Boys! But the thing about being in a band with longevity is that you eventually outrun all that crap anyway."

Cradle's relationship with Sony lasted for a single album, with *Nymphetamine* emerging on Roadrunner just a year after *Damnation And A Day*. When asked if they were in a hurry to get something out on their new label, Dani explains that it was more a case of the band just being on a roll.

"We were fuelled up at this time. We'd headlined the B-stage of the American Ozzfest for 10 weeks, which was a big, big deal," he recalls. "We took Type O Negative out in support of us in the States – and I think some of that Type O rubbed off on us a little bit with some of the songwriting. Sony didn't really understand us, and they let us go without holding us to any contract, with Roadrunner waiting in the wings. We were riding high as a band, and that's why we were so swiftly off the bat."

Following a string of full- and partial-concept albums, the band wanted to return to a more varied approach on *Nymphetamine*. This coincided with a change in the songwriting process, with former keyboard player Martin Powell telling blog Jävla Musik that they went from "writing as a full band in the rehearsal room, to each of us working on our own songs on our own studio set-ups".

He also claimed that he wrote a few songs in their entirety, along with "the majority" of the title track.

"What I remember is that we wrote the song and it was vastly different," Dani says. "People started discussing the merits of shortening it into just the middle section but I wanted to keep the original like a triptych, with wings on both sides. The original vocal pattern was twice the speed and we were trying to work out how we were going to get this to work. Then one Sunday afternoon I was like, 'Right, everybody is going out somewhere, I'm going to sit down and work this out.' I ran the vocals at half speed and it suddenly dawned on me, 'This is actually quite clever.' OK, it sounds really obvious, but it wasn't at the time."

The recording sessions themselves were a little stop-start, with producer Rob Caggiano having to leave at one point to go on tour as then-lead guitarist with Anthrax. Dani came down with a pollen allergy that prevented him singing for a while, but these were, he says, pretty standard obstacles for any long-term band. In the end, both the longer *Nymphetamine (Overdose)* and the reworked *Nymphetamine (Fix)* were included on the album, with the shortened version acting as a kind of closing reprise.

As well as Dani's barking shrieks, both versions benefited from a guest appearance by former Theatre Of Tragedy and Leaves' Eyes vocalist Liv Kristine. It wasn't the first time Cradle had employed a female singer – Andrea Meyer had appeared on debut album *The Principle Of Evil Made Flesh*, and Sarah Jezebel Deva sang as a backing vocalist with the band for almost 14 years, but they wanted a different voice for *Nymphetamine*.

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2004

ALBUM:
Nymphetamine

PERSONNEL:
Dani Filth (vocals), Liv Kristine (vocals), Paul Allender (guitar), James McIlroy (guitar), Martin Powell (keyboards), Dave Pybus (bass), Adrian Erlandsson (drums)

PRESS

Cradle Of Filth (left to right): Dave Pybus, Paul Allender, Dani Filth, Adrian Erlandsson, James McIlroy, Martin Powell

Dani vaguely recalls having a connection to Liv through her then-husband, Alex Krull of Atrocity.

"Roadrunner US got in touch with me out of the blue and asked me to do some vocals for *Nymphetamine*. They needed my vocals very quickly," Liv told *Brave Words* at the time, adding that she recorded them remotely at Alex's Mastersound Studio in Germany. "I fell in love with the song straight away… I love the contrast between Dani's vocals and mine. The feeling of the song might remind you of [*Where The Wild Roses Grow* by] Kylie Minogue and Nick Cave," she added.

"So she just ripped it off then, did she?" laughs Dani, when we tell him about her comparison. "I guess she's talking about that sort of 'Beauty and the Beast' vibe, although it's a horrible thing to call her a beast! No, I see what she means – it is a cool juxtaposition. And again, we've employed that throughout our career. In fact, we're doing that even still with our collaboration with Ed Sheeran."

Unlike the Kylie and Nick Cave duet, *Nymphetamine* doesn't end in bloody murder, but it does explore the darker side of love, lust and obsession. The title itself is a portmanteau of 'nymphette' and 'amphetamine', and at the time Dani described the song as concerning itself "with a love affair so intense, that although soured and dead, it ignites at the slightest sniff of reinvention".

> **"TYPE O NEGATIVE RUBBED OFF ON US A LITTLE BIT"**
> DANI FILTH

"It's a kind of morbid love letter," he nods today. "And unhealthy. An addiction, as love often is. Probably worse than alcohol or heroin – to those of us who are divorced," he adds with a chuckle.

As already mentioned, the approach to songwriting on the *Nymphetamine* album was markedly different to 1998's *Cruelty And The Beast* – a concept album based around Elizabeth Bathory – 2000's Clive Barker-inspired *Midian* or 2003's *Damnation And A Day*, which the singer describes as "a huge, convoluted album literally dripping off the CD, about the fall of Lucifer".

"To paraphrase Alice Cooper, he's not writing songs about the Fall of Man and politics and that sort of thing. He just wants to hear how your girlfriend's doing," he grins. "It was refreshing to go back to that, because I'm a bit of a gothic romantic at heart and the lyrics on the album were more Byron-esque."

Of course, famed poet Lord Byron probably wouldn't have used *Airwolf* as a placeholder. Taken from the hokey 80s military helicopter-themed TV series, that was the unlikely working title of the album's title track until it was completed.

Another key element of the success of *Nymphetamine (Fix)* was the suitably ▶

Dani Filth offers a spiky embrace

"I'M A GOTHIC ROMANTIC AT HEART"

DANI FILTH

gothic black and white music video that accompanied it.

Liv Kristine flew over for the shoot, which took place partly in the tunnels around the London Dungeon and was directed by Dani Jacobs, who had previously enjoyed success in the pop world with the likes of Tears For Fears, The Corrs and Steps.

"We didn't have a lot of time to film it but we did have a lot of cool costumes and ideas," Dani recalls. "Most of our previous videos had full stories going on, but much like the album, this was more freeform. And it's obviously one that's stood the test of time."

Buoyed by the video and their burgeoning success, Cradle Of Filth secured that Best Metal Performance nomination at the 47th Annual Grammy Awards in 2005 alongside Slipknot, Hatebreed, Killswitch Engage and Motörhead. The latter bagged the award with their cover of Metallica's *Whiplash* – a fact Dani remains philosophical about.

"They're the Grammys, they don't really know about subgenres," he shrugs. "Metal comes on, they go, 'Oh, Motörhead we know about them. We'll vote for those.'"

So has *Nymphetamine* itself stood the test of time, in both of its guises? There's no doubting that the original extended *Nymphetamine (Overdose)* version has been overlooked, despite those enfolding 'wings', as Dani calls them, providing some excellent metallic dynamics at either side of the far better-known middle section.

"I still love the [*Overdose*] version. We were going to play it live, but the longer you go on, the trickier it gets to put the setlist together without missing anything," Dani shrugs.

And *Nymphetamine (Fix)*?

"Every time I hear it, it sends a shiver of fear and revulsion through me, because it means I'm probably in the toilet and I should be at the soundcheck instead," he laughs. "Seriously though, it's the go-to song, and I'm not one of those people moaning, 'Oh, I wish I'd never written that, now I have to play it every day.' I don't have any qualms about playing it until the day I die."

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HAND OF KALLIACH

The husband-and-wife duo fusing Gaelic folk music and melodeath to explore Scotland's rich mythology

WORDS: JON GARCIA • PICTURES: MATTHIEU GILL

LIKE THE SCOTTISH whirlpool that lends its name to their second album, *Corryvreckan*, Hand Of Kalliach's rush of melodic death metal and Gaelic folk music will pull you into a vortex of powerful guitars and ethereal siren songs. The Edinburgh-based husband-and-wife duo weave tales around ancient myths as grand as their homeland.

"It was a wild and weird project that we wanted to do just for us," guitarist and vocalist John Fraser says. "It started as something to really escape and break up the monotony of the pandemic lockdowns."

John and his wife, co-vocalist Sophie Fraser, have three young children and have led a quiet life in the nine years they've been married. Never in their wildest dreams would they have thought they'd be releasing music together, let alone sign to a record label.

"I got asked in an interview how I feel about being a musician," Sophie says. "I don't think I'd actually realised that I *was* a musician. It's just very strange to think of myself like that. I'm a very accidental musician."

Stuck at home in 2020, the Frasers fell down a Wikipedia rabbit hole of Scottish folklore, tinkering with putting those stories against an undertow of death metal, amplified by melodies of traditional Gaelic music.

"We'd talked about doing something for a while with a Celtic vein that had a very different interpretation of folk," John explains. "Obviously at the moment you've got a lot of popularity of Nordic mythology, but there's as much on the Scottish mythology side of things that nobody knows about, including Scottish people. So it was a lot of fun digging into that – the more you dig, the more there is."

On a whim, they released their first few demos through Bandcamp, expecting to get lost in the ocean of new and independent music. But instead, they found an audience, inspiring them to self-release their debut album, *Samhainn*, in 2021. In January 2024, it was announced they had signed with Prosthetic ahead of the release of new album *Corryvreckan* a month later.

"I think we were emboldened and confident that we had the right sort of sound and that we were in the right ballpark," John says about their evolution to *Corryvreckan*.

John and Sophie met about 12 years ago in what she recalls was "a really grubby, crusty rock club in Aberdeen". Folk music has been part of their relationship since the start.

"One of our first dates was at this little pub called The Blue Lantern," she recalls, turning to John. "There was this incredible folk night and this female singer who had haunting vocals. That's kind of stayed with us, and we try and emulate that quite a lot – that traditional, ethereal, haunting kind of sound."

In Hand Of Kalliach's music, Sophie's ghostly, disembodied croon contrasts with John's growl and wall-of-sound guitars, resulting in songs that range from mesmerising and soothing to utterly apocalyptic.

"We kind of stumbled onto it," John admits of their signature sound. "Sophie was doing some high vocals for the first demo, and when we were playing it back, I'd accidentally left three of the other takes on the channel at the same time. It created this amazingly freaky chorus effect which, because it was so high-pitched, had this spectral quality."

Hand Of Kalliach's lyrics are a mixture of Gaelic and English, while swells of cello, synths and bagpipes augment pummelling death metal riffs, translating the aggressiveness of melodeath without drowning the listener in twee folk stereotypes.

"We want the folk to build the atmosphere, more than anything," John says. "Fundamentally, a lot of what we're making is rooted in melodic death metal."

Even the band's name is taken from Scottish folklore – it's a play on Cailleach, an ancient witch god of winter, said to live at the bottom of the Corryvreckan whirlpool. Considered to be a creator and a destroyer, the contrasting legends surrounding her have inspired all angles of the band.

"The split tales that you see in the mythology really resonated with where we were going sonically," John says. "We're trying to build that duality and contrast."

> **"THERE'S AS MUCH SCOTTISH FOLKLORE AS THERE IS NORSE MYTHOLOGY"**

The Frasers want their success to inspire other budding artists. Their music didn't get discovered because they were following a trend, but because they were being true to who they were and what they wanted to do.

"There's probably a lot of bands who thought nobody was gonna listen," Sophie says. "We want other people to have the stones to just give it a try and back themselves," John adds.

The next step is getting the band onstage, with the aim of eventually touring the UK. John and Sophie have recruited a live guitarist and drummer, and rehearse whenever they can find someone to watch their kids. Their biggest challenge is adapting their ambitious and layered recorded material for a new setting.

"We can't have a full choir and a harpist and a cellist up onstage," John reasons. "We're still working out the kinks just to make sure it's going to sound right."

But the practices have fuelled their appetite to take Hand Of Kalliach to the next level. Until recently, their music only existed in their headphones. Now there are other musicians playing their songs the way they were meant to be played.

"It was actually the first time we'd heard our sounds being played loud," John says of their first rehearsal. "It was like, 'Wow! This is such a lift and a blast!'" H

IN SHORT

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WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER, DAVE EVERLEY, PERRAN HELYES, RICH HOBSON, DANNII LEIVERS, MATT MILLS, JONATHAN SELZER, KEVIN STEWART-PANKO, PAUL TRAVERS

From metal's original earthquaking anthems to the modern classics that are pushing things forward, this is the soundtrack to a musical revolution that has lasted 50 years and counting

01 BLACK SABBATH
Black Sabbath
(BLACK SABBATH, 1970)

This is where it starts: with pouring rain, a clanging funeral bell and a crack of thunder. Six minutes and 20 seconds later, the whole of heavy metal's future is mapped out before us. Sabbath weren't the first band to weaponise the blues – Led Zeppelin had released two albums by the time the Sabbs' debut came out – but they were the ones who fully realised its pure malevolent power. More than 50 years on, *Black Sabbath* sounds like a revolution at quarter-speed: that never-matched opening Iommi riff, the boundary-pushing occult imagery, Ozzy's descent into madness as the song picks up panicked speed (let's not forget that, like so many Sabbath songs, it's a cautionary tale)… it all became as important to metal as breathing. People had heard 'heavy' before, but they'd never heard it like this. Things truly would never be the same again. DE

02 LED ZEPPELIN
Immigrant Song
(LED ZEPPELIN III, 1970)

'Valhalla, I am coming!' With those four words, Led Zeppelin launched the dragon-prowed longship that would eventually lead to waves of invasion by axe-wielding Viking metal bands. The scything guitars and insistent rhythms recall the threshing oars referenced in the lyrics, but it's the evocative imagery more than the actual music that really set the scene for every other Norse-obsessed band to follow. Enslaved are the most prominent such act to have paid tribute, with a cover of the song played live on Norwegian TV, though the classic riff and Robert Plant's iconic wail also implanted itself into the wider metal consciousness, which is why the song has also been covered by everyone from Dark Angel to Stryper. PT

Black Sabbath: all hail!

03 KISS
Rock And Roll All Nite
(DRESSED TO KILL, 1975)

Rock'n'roll needed nobody's permission to party, but Kiss gave it anyway with the exuberant final song on their third album. Its simple message – rock'n'roll all night, party every day – became the handbook for a million teenage rebels who dreamed of getting loaded and living like their idols (ironic, given Gene Simmons claims never to have been drunk). The studio version was a moderate hit in early 1975, but it was the live version from the same year's career-making *Alive!* album that rocketed Kiss's previously stuttering career into the stratosphere – the start of a journey that turned them into one of the biggest bands and certainly the biggest brand in history. Without it, the Kiss empire - and modern merchandising – could have looked very different. DE

Rainbow: pure magic

GETTY

04 RAINBOW
Stargazer
(RAINBOW RISING, 1976)

Rock had reached for the epic before, most notably via Led Zeppelin's *Stairway To Heaven*, but the centrepiece of Rainbow's second album was something else. Former Deep Purple guitarist-turned-Rainbow leader Ritchie Blackmore approached this towering, eight-and-a-half-minute masterpiece like a classical composer, layering on the drama and grandeur as he constructed his magnificent musical edifice. But it was singer Ronnie James Dio who breathed life into it with a magisterial performance that made lyrics about wizards and rainbows seem like the most logical thing in the world. Metal's lifelong love affair with the fantastical began here, and *Stargazer* remains the benchmark by which all subsequent epics should be judged. DE

05 VAN HALEN
Eruption
(VAN HALEN, 1978)

There are multiple reasons why this landmark sub-two-minute guitar solo-cum-Eddie Van Halen showcase was so transformative. It bridged the disparate worlds of hard rock and classical. It introduced two-handed fretboard tapping. It's inarguably one of the greatest and most recognisable guitar solos of all time. It inspired next-level shredding. And before *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, it made hanging out in music shops on Saturday afternoons the most obnoxious experience since *Stairway To Heaven*. Fact of the matter is, *Eruption* had to be strong-armed onto the album by producer Ted Templeman and it's not even Eddie at his best, at least according to the man himself. "I didn't even play it right," he told *Guitar World* magazine. "There's a mistake at the top end of it. To this day, whenever I hear it, I always think, 'Man, I could've played it better.'" Good lord. KSP

06 JUDAS PRIEST
Exciter
(STAINED CLASS, 1978)

"If you ask me what the first thrash metal song was, it's *Exciter* by Judas Priest," Exodus/Slayer guitarist Gary Holt once told us, identifying the track that kickstarted the hyperactive one-upmanship that dominated 80s metal. "We just set out to write the fastest track ever written," K.K. Downing told author Martin Popoff of *Exciter*'s modus operandi in 2007. Opening the *Stained Class* album, it certainly delivered on that promise. Les Binks's double bass dexterity and rapid-fire fills propelled the song with such infectious momentum, it changed how drummers drum, while the intensified tempo, along with Glenn Tipton/K.K. Downing's triumphant mid-song twin-harmony fanfare and Rob Halford's ascending shrieks, confirm *Exciter* as the point where Priest truly became the beast we know and love, gears constantly shifting, advancing a new set of standards for metal's 80s future. CC

07 MOTÖRHEAD
Overkill
(OVERKILL, 1979)

'Only way to feel the noise is when it's good and loud...' Motörhead didn't just find their sound with their second album, but set a new pace for metal, covered by everyone from The Damned to Metallica. The song's now-iconic double bass intro was a result of Philthy Animal Taylor practising in the studio, the drummer explaining in the documentary *The Guts And The Glory* that he was "just trying to get [his] co-ordination right". *Overkill* was also the final song the band ever played, its frantic racket a fitting send-off for the band that were – for a time at least – the loudest noise on the planet. RH

Judas Priest's Les Binks, K.K. Downing, Glenn Tipton, Rob Halford and Ian Hill: no snoozing on the job

08 KILLING JOKE
Wardance
(KILLING JOKE, 1980)

Killing Joke's debut single marked a hitherto unexplored area where post-punk bled into tribal metal with a bleak industrial clatter. It was particularly influential on the industrial metal scene to come, with Nine Inch Nails, Ministry and Godflesh among others owing a huge debt to the song. The influence goes deeper though, slicing through every metal band with a penchant for dense, unstoppable grooves. The likes of Metallica, Soundgarden and Faith No More have acknowledged their debt to Killing Joke, while groove metal pioneers like Helmet and Prong borrowed heavily from *Wardance*'s apocalyptic drive. "It's what gave us this reputation of having this bludgeoning assault," KJ bassist Youth said of the song, neatly summing up its enduring influence and appeal. PT

Motörhead: definitely good, definitely loud

09 SAXON
Wheels Of Steel
(WHEELS OF STEEL, 1980)

By the end of the 1970s, many of metal's original gods were old, bloated and out of touch. It took Saxon to usher in the new decade and bring things back to where they belonged: the streets. A bunch of bluff, unpretentious Yorkshiremen, these NWOBHM first wavers made music that sounded like it had simultaneously been forged in the factories of their native Barnsley and acted as a euphoric release from the drudgery of daily life. *Wheels Of Steel* was a Barnsley *Born To Be Wild* – a barnstorming petrolhead's fantasy of hurtling down the open road at 140mph, flipping the bird to "motorway pigs" and the world in general. "I don't take no bull... shit!" hollered Biff Byford, like Jeremy Clarkson in silver spandex trousers, as the song screeched into the UK Top 40, leaving smoking tyre marks in its wake. Metal was back in the hands of the working class. DE

JUDAS PRIEST: KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGE. MOTÖRHEAD: WATAL ASANUMA/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGE

Bad Brains: fast and furious

10 BAD BRAINS

Pay To Cum

(PAY TO CUM SINGLE, 1980)

If punk lit a fire under metal, Bad Brains strapped a rocket to it and shot it into the sun. Four Black youths from the South West side of Washington D.C., they started out as a jazz-fusion outfit named Mind Power before they discovered punk rock.

"I was a fan of [jazz fusion bass pioneer] Stanley Clarke and now I was getting into punk," bassist Darryl Jenifer recalls of the band's turning point. "Most kids were just into punk, but here I was loving fusion. So I was like, 'Punk rock? Shiiit, I'll *kill* this.' I can remember turning to Sid [McCray, original Bad Brains vocalist] and saying, 'If the Ramones think they can play fast, watch this!'"

"YOU REALISE YOU CAN'T TURBO-BANG A COWBELL!'"
DARRYL JENIFER

Clocking in at less than two minutes, their 1980 debut single, *Pay To Cum*, was a blast of hyperactive lightning, pushing the genre to almost absurd speeds. In Bad Brains' own way, it was just paying forward the impact punk had on them. Darryl remembers that the band's early songwriting was "stream of consciousness," ideas put together in a jam with "tricky bits" that helped differentiate the likes of *Don't Need It*, *Supertouch/Shitfit* and *Pay To Cum*.

"The Bad Brains sound was a combination of plain old D.C. soul, [jazz fusion group] Return To Forever technical shit, and The Damned mixed with the Ramones with a little nudge from The Dickies on the speed," he explains.

The song's immense speed didn't happen overnight, though.

"I created *Pay To Cum* as a takeoff of the Ramones' approach – it was actually a lot slower at first," he says. "It got faster as we went on. There's a cowbell in that original version, and you realise as it gets faster there's no way you can turbo-bang a cowbell – it'll only go so fast!"

With less cowbell and more speed, *Pay To Cum* helped plant the roots of hardcore punk, and with it thrash metal. Bad Brains bridged those worlds, inspiring everyone from Minor Threat to Metallica, Killswitch Engage and Dave Grohl among countless others, occasionally popping up on bills with the likes of Slayer to remind everyone who did it first.

"All the metal dudes could play and had pretty girlfriends," Darryl concedes. "But they started coming to our shows and saw how energised little bald punk kids were, and realised they had to get up and get on it!" **RH**

GLEN E. FRIEDMAN/BAD BRAINS RECORDS

Clive Burr, Paul Di'Anno, Dennis Stratton, Dave Murray and Steve Harris... with Eddie breathing down their necks

IRON MAIDEN: EUGÈNE ADEBARI/SHUTTERSTOCK

11 IRON MAIDEN
Running Free
(IRON MAIDEN, 1980)

The term New Wave Of British Heavy Metal was coined by *Sounds* magazine in April 1979, but it took almost a year before this blossoming movement got its first great anthem. Kicking off with a sped-up glam rock drumbeat, Iron Maiden's exhilarating debut single fused the energy of punk to metal's outlaw spirit. *'I'm running wild, I'm running free',* howled 21-year-old Paul Di'Anno, offering a glorious escape from the dole queue hell of turn-of-the-80s Britain. The single bovver-booted its way into the UK Top 40 on its release in early 1980, though its influence spread much further – a Danish teenager named Lars Ulrich was just one of countless young rock fans paying attention. One of metal's all-time-great bands were off to the races. Former Iron Maiden frontman Paul Di'Anno reflects on the song that started it all…

What do you remember about writing *Running Free*?
"Me and Steve [Harris, Maiden founder/bassist] had the idea. We wrote it at the place where we used to rehearse, Hollywood Studio in Clapton [East London], which was owned by a guy behind this kids' TV show, *Metal Mickey*. I liked punk and T. Rex and Slade, so I bought all that into it. I had this idea for a glam rock drumbeat, we put the bassline down, and we had it done in about 20 minutes."

What inspired the lyrics?
"It's about freedom, not giving a toss. Especially when it comes to the Old Bill. I haven't got a very good relationship with 'em, never have done. Football and an association with the Hells Angels, that'll do it. At 16, you think you're the centre of the world, nothing can stop you, all that stuff. What was I like at 16? I was a little cunt! Ha ha ha! I still am. I've got no better."

What can you remember about recording it?
"I was terrified. I had never been in a proper recording studio before. But the producer, Wil Malone, what a fucking plonker. Terrible. I say to this day that some of the songs on the first Maiden album are absolutely the best they did, not just the ones they did with me. But if it had a better production, who knows where it would have gone. Mind you, it did pretty well as it was."

When did it become obvious that *Running Free* was a big deal?
"It was obvious pretty early on that it was going to be a big song. It's got this chanty chorus, people could sing along to it. I remember playing it on *Top Of The Pops* – we were the first band to play live since The Who. Mind you, the sound was fucking awful – I've had my telly on louder than that. I do remember [new romantic dandies] Spandau Ballet watching us across the studio, though. They looked fucking terrified."

In the lyrics, you sing: *'I spent the night in an LA jail?'* Did you ever get arrested?
"Not in LA! Ha ha ha! I did get arrested the first night I played live with Iron Maiden, at The Swan in Hammersmith. I used to work in this place that reconditioned oil drums, and you needed a knife to get the caps off. I'd gone to the gig straight from work, and I had the knife in my bag. We went to the pub, and the Old Bill decided they were going to raid the place. They found this knife and did me for having an offensive weapon. Someone said to [Maiden manager] Rod Smallwood, 'Hey, your singer's been carted down the nick.' Steve ended up singing most of the gig. I made it back in time for the last song."

> **"THE OLD BILL DID ME FOR HAVING A KNIFE"**
> PAUL DI'ANNO

***Running Free* helped put the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal on the map. Did you feel part of something bigger?**
"Nah, we felt like we were out on our own. They couldn't pigeonhole us – we were a heavy metal band, but we played fast like a punk band but with all these complicated riffs. They didn't know how to label us, so they called us New Wave Of British Heavy Metal. Next thing you know, every fucking band is jumping on that one."

Does *Running Free* feel like an important song?
"Nah, it was just a laugh. But people can't get enough of it. If I didn't play it at my gigs, I'd get strung up. You play it in South America and it feels like you're in the middle of a fucking earthquake." DE

GIRLSCHOOL: GETTY

12 DISCHARGE
Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing
(HEAR NOTHING SEE NOTHING SAY NOTHING, 1982)

Discharge were the UK punks who changed extreme metal at an atomic level. While the parallel New Wave Of British Heavy Metal was booming, the spike-haired Stoke-On-Trent four-piece were pushing music beyond its established boundaries with *Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing*'s cataclysmic assault. This was barely recognisable as the kind of punk that had emerged midway through the 70s – melody was replaced by screaming, atonal guitars, tuneless hollered warnings about how people were willingly being led to their doom by the powers-that-be, and the immortal 'd-beat' rhythm that would become Discharge's signature. From Napalm Death in Birmingham to Metallica in the Bay Area to Sepultura in Belo Horizonte, a generation of musicians would rally to its ragged flag. PH

Girlschool smashed through metal's glass ceiling

13 GIRLSCHOOL
Emergency
(DEMOLITION, 1980)

Seventies metal was, frankly, a bit of a sausage fest. But with their 1980 debut, *Demolition*, South London's Girlschool helped level the playing field. Metal's first all-female group, Girlschool emerged from the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal with a punk-inflected, pacy metal sound, their debut single *Take It All Away* impressing their contemporaries enough to land them tours with Motörhead and Budgie. While it wasn't the highest-charting single from *Demolition* – that was their cover of 60s rockers The Gun's *Race With The Devil*, which reached No.49 – *Emergency* was the wider public's introduction to Girlschool, and a statement that metal wasn't exclusively a boys' club anymore. "There were a lot of boys in bands, but they never made us uncomfortable," guitarist and vocalist Kim McAuliffe told *Hammer* in 2021. "We'd have kicked their arses if they did." RH

14 OZZY OSBOURNE
Crazy Train

(BLIZZARD OF OZZ, 1980)

When Ozzy Osbourne was booted from Black Sabbath on April 27 1979, by his own reckoning he was "unemployed and unemployable". But in August the following year, the singer was bouncing back with an all-new band, wunderkind guitarist Randy Rhoads helping cement Ozzy as a star in his own right. It was a miraculous comeback, not least because the singer had spent three months on a coke-and-booze binge. Rescued from self-destruction by future manager and wife Sharon Osbourne, *Crazy Train* didn't just bring Ozzy back, it reinvented him. Ozzy's maniacal laugh in the track's intro highlighted a playfulness that stood in stark contrast to Sabbath's doom-and-gloom, and Randy's exuberant riffs helped shift heavy metal from arenas to something fit for stadiums. RH

With guitarist Randy Rhoads, drummer Lee Kerslake and bassist Bob Daisley, Ozzy made one helluva comeback

15 BLACK FLAG
Rise Above

(DAMAGED, 1981)

It's open to question who the very first hardcore punk band was, but there's no debate as to who defined the sound in its purest form and solidified the independent ethos on which the scene was built: Black Flag. And nothing encapsulated them like *Rise Above*, a pummelling blast of noise, attitude and barked lyrics, the latter courtesy of frontman Henry Rollins. The Los Angeles band had paid their dues for several years by that point, battling the authorities and sometimes even their own fans, and the message that ran through *Rise Above* was hard-earned: it's not that punk rock can flourish outside the mainstream, it's that it *should*. It galvanised the underground, laying the foundations of a hardcore scene – and a lifestyle – that endures to this day. SH

16 SUICIDAL TENDENCIES
Institutionalized

(SUICIDAL TENDENCIES, 1983)

How different would things have been if Mike Muir's mom had given him a Pepsi? *Institutionalized* ('*mom just give me a Pepsi, please*') was an innovative vanguard of a track. Not only did these Venice Beach street rats re-jig conventional songwriting structure by having original guitarist Grant Estes wail away on a perpetual motion machine of lead guitar – despite being written by bassist Louiche Mayorga – and spark the introduction of vocalist Mike's ranting preacher-man persona, it signalled the moment when hardcore punk moved beyond one-dimensionality to inject a breadth of emotion, mood, tempo and skill. It emerged as a progressive oasis from a sound/scene already cannibalising itself, elbowing its way onto a nascent MTV in the process. *Institutionalized* moved hardcore out of the underground, even if hardcore wasn't keen to follow. KSP

17 MÖTLEY CRÜE
Shout At The Devil

(SHOUT AT THE DEVIL, 1983)

Any ankle-biter headbanger who came up during the triangulation of the Satanic Panic, Mötley Crüe's second album, and the carving out of their pre-teen identity probably remembers screaming matches and the defence of "But mom/dad/schoolteacher, they're saying, 'Shout *at* the Devil!'" While said album teemed with bangers like *Looks That Kill*, *Too Young To Fall In Love* and *Red Hot*, it was the title track that showed there was depth to these hooligan ruffians. They could wrap anthemic metal around rocking riffs, stop-on-a-dime staccato and doomy tempos. The song wasn't the serenade to Satan most thought it was; it was a demonstrative rallying cry for all of metaldom, from sun-kissed beach babes and feather-haired dudes in Camaros to nefarious thrashers and black metal futurists, and planted the seed for the glam metal explosion that would dominate the rest of the decade, for good and for ill. KSP

Mercyful Fate inspired legions

18 MERCYFUL FATE
Evil

(MELISSA, 1983)

Originally broadcast to the masses via the BBC's pivotal *Friday Rock Show* before appearing on Mercyful Fate's beloved debut album, *Evil* allied King Diamond's blasphemous braggadocio to an elegant compositional approach, devising a blueprint for Ghost's entire career, as well as countless underground acolytes (Attic, Portrait, Wolf, In Solitude). The moody time changes, melodic embellishments and turnover of infectious riffs advanced black metal beyond Venom's feral racket, inspiring Metallica and Slayer on their journey to musical fruition. By keeping one foot in the 70s rock of Uriah Heep and UFO, *Evil* presented a far more accessible proposition than other pioneering transgressors like Bathory or Possessed. Their prog leanings made a palpable impact on extreme metal's creative ambition, while the flamboyantly ghoulish lyrics gave 90s Norwegian BM a model of bad behaviour to aspire to. CC

Venom: so vital they named an entire genre

19 VENOM

Black Metal

(BLACK METAL, 1982)

From the ridiculous opening din of a chainsaw cutting through a studio door, sweeping away the listener with delirious momentum, Venom launched their second LP with a rallying cry for growing legions of morbid noise freaks. Having garnered attention – and ridicule – with 1981's *Welcome To Hell*, the Geordie trio set about destroying speakers altogether with this follow-up, defining their raucous whirlwind of sound with surely the most far-reaching songtitle in metal. Frontman Cronos recalled the brainwave behind the groundbreaking nomenclature to *Metal Hammer* in 2019:

"I had been calling us 'power metal' for years and we'd been through all the others – thrash metal and all of that. And then I thought, 'Black metal! That's us!' It summed up everything. So I wrote the song *Black Metal* to deliberately be like… there you go, wallop!"

Arguably the greatest 'There you go, wallop!' song of all time, this out-of-control anthem broke down Venom's MO with fantastical – but warranted – levels of self-aggrandisement, cocking a snook at their many detractors. Ratcheting the sonic devastation beyond even Venom's apocalyptic debut, *Black Metal* acted as an aspirational manifesto for a new breed of 80s headbanger who wanted their metal dirtier, louder, faster and wilder. It's a cohort that found itself multiplying exponentially once this song was out in the world, so seductive was Cronos's barked invitation to *'Come ride the night with us / Rock hard and fight'* and exhortations to *'Lay down your soul to the gods' rock'n'roll'*. Even so, Venom's newly minted genre descriptor was so brash and radical, it took more than 10 years for a fully fledged scene to take the name and do it justice.

> **"WE WERE THE CROWBAR THAT KNOCKED THE DOORS DOWN"**
> MANTAS

The roll call of acolytes queuing up to cover this seminal work over the years – including Mayhem (formed when guitarist Euronymous and bassist Necrobutcher discovered a mutual love of the *Black Metal* LP), Cradle Of Filth, Dimmu Borgir, Vader, Voivod, Destruction, Sigh and Hypocrisy – makes plain the debt that metal owes to the visionary self-belief and chutzpah of Cronos, Mantas and Abaddon, cast in stone on this song that launched a movement.

"Every forest fire needs a spark," guitarist Mantas told *The Metal Voice* in 2015. "And I think we were the spark. We were the crowbar that knocked the doors down and said, 'It's OK to do this.' And am I proud of it? Absolutely." CC ▶

GETTY

The legendary *Kill 'Em All* line-up: James Hetfield, Kirk Hammett, Lars Ulrich, Cliff Burton

ANDRE CSILLAG/SHUTTERSTOCK

20 METALLICA

Hit The Lights

(KILL 'EM ALL, 1983)

Metallica have bigger songs. They have better songs. But no Metallica song has had the same impact as the one that opened their game-changing debut album, *Kill 'Em All*. Four minutes and 17 seconds of suburban fury, *Hit The Lights* fired the starting pistol on the career of the most successful metal band in history and, by extension, invented modern metal as we know it.

If anyone can take credit for inadvertently galvanising both *Hit The Lights* and Metallica themselves into existence, it's Brian Slagel. An LA fanzine writer and aspiring record label mogul with an ardent love of heavy metal, he'd met an exuberant, ambitious 17-year-old Danish ex-pat named Lars Ulrich in the parking lot of a Michael Schenker Group gig in Los Angeles in 1980. Lars hadn't been in LA long, arriving there after abandoning his hopes of becoming a professional tennis player like his dad to pursue his rock'n'roll dreams.

"I remember being at his house one day, and he had a drum set in the corner – not put together, just the pieces," Brian told *Metal Hammer* in 2021. "He goes, 'I'm gonna start a band.' 'Yeah, sure, Lars, whatever…'"

Lars had been jamming with a bunch of musicians, including a lanky kid he'd met named James Hetfield. Nothing had come of any of it, but Lars wasn't ready to give up. When Brian Slagel told his friend in the autumn of 1981 that he was putting together a compilation album titled *Metal Massacre* to showcase the underground LA metal scene, Lars wanted in.

"He called me up and said, 'Hey, if I put together a band, can I be on your compilation album?'" said Brian.

That band would be the earliest incarnation of Metallica: essentially Lars and his new buddy James jamming in a bedroom. The song they wrote for the *Metal Massacre* compilation – the very first song they ever wrote together – was *Hit The Lights*, an enthusiastic slice of early 80s heavy metal cannibalised from an existing song James had from a previous group.

"Hetfield brought in the verses and the chorus, which came from something he had done in a band called Leather Charm, and I brought in the whole back half of it, which was from something I had done before," Lars told *Metal Hammer* in 2016. "After three verses and three choruses, it goes into this whole other universe, with a new riff and a fucking half-hour-long jam out."

The pair enlisted the help of Lloyd Grant, a hotshot guitarist Lars had been jamming with who could play the solos James couldn't (though the latter did play bass).

"They'd got a tape and it was an early instrumental version of *Hit The Lights*," Lloyd told *Metal Hammer* in 2016. "I liked it – I wish *we'd* written it! It was probably a bit faster than I was trying to write at the time, but it was right up my alley."

> **"LARS SAID, 'I'M GONNA START A BAND!' 'YEAH, SURE, LARS…'"**
> BRIAN SLAGEL

The band didn't even have a name at this point. After cycling through some fairly unpromising options, Lars settled on a name he had pilfered from a friend who was considering it for the title of a fanzine: Metallica.

Hit The Lights may have been written and recorded for the *Metal Massacre* compilation, eventually released in June 1982, but it made its debut three months earlier as the opening track on Metallica's first proper demo, recorded in March 1982. This version had been redone by the first solid Metallica line-up assembled by James and Lars, featuring the singer's schoolfriend and ex-Leather Charm bandmate Ron McGovney on bass and a wild, charismatic kid named Dave Mustaine on second guitar.

"The song wasn't bad," wrote Dave Mustaine in his 2010 autobiography *Mustaine: A Heavy Metal Memoir* of the first time he heard *Hit The Lights*. "The playing was uniformly sloppy, the sound quality even worse, and the singer had little pitch control or charisma. But there was energy. And style. When it ended, Lars smiled. 'What do you think?' 'You need more guitar solos, that's for sure.'"

Despite his criticisms, the prototype version is easily recognisable as the one that would eventually open *Kill 'Em All*. James Hetfield's singing is a more indebted to the trad-metal of the time than his later feral snap, but the jagged chug and air of malicious intent are both evident.

The band knew the value of the song from the very start. It was the opening number at their first ever gig, at Radio City, Anaheim, on March 14, 1982 (a position that it would hold in the Metallica setlist until early 1984). By the time it re-appeared on the landmark *No Life 'Til Leather* demo, released in July 1982, it had become the closest thing they had to a signature song. It certainly provided Metallica with their mission statement. *'No life 'til leather / We're gonna kick some ass tonight,'* howled James, a promise those early Metallica shows certainly delivered on.

Spearheaded by *Hit The Lights*, the *No Life 'Til Leather* demo became Metallica's calling card. A network of grassroots tape traders began circulating it, its speed and aggression setting it apart from most other metal songs at the time. One person who heard *No Life 'Til Leather* was Jon Zazula, aka Jonny Z, who owned and ran the record shop Rockn'Roll Heaven from his house in New Jersey with his wife Marsha.

"We sold demo tapes at the time, but we didn't play them 'cos they sounded so crappy," Jon told *Metal Hammer* in 2016. "But we happened to play this one and it was, 'Wow, this is amazing!' It just had this energy and speed to it that other bands

The Kill 'Em All tour. *Hit The Lights* was their killer opening track for years

didn't." So impressed was he that he offered to manage the band, subsequently founding his own record label, Megaforce, to release Metallica's debut album when no other labels were interested. Sadly, Jon passed away in 2022, a year after Marsha.

Metallica didn't exist in isolation. Other bands were making equally forward-looking rackets: Slayer in Los Angeles, Anthrax in New York, Exodus up the coast in the Bay Area. But Metallica had gotten there first with *Hit The Lights*, and they were perpetually half a length ahead of the competition.

Metal Massacre, the compilation that prompted Lars Ulrich to form his band, was finally released in June 1982. *Hit The Lights*, still featuring one of Lloyd Grant's original solos (much to Dave Mustaine's annoyance), was its closing track. The song was erroneously credited to 'Mettallica.'

"Yeah, we got it wrong," Brian Slagel told *Metal Hammer*. "I don't think it did them any harm in the long run."

"JAMES HAD LITTLE CHARISMA. BUT THERE WAS ENERGY"

DAVE MUSTAINE

It certainly didn't. When Metallica released *Kill 'Em All* in July 1983 via Johnny and Marsha Z's Megaforce label, *Hit The Lights* took its rightful place as the record's opening track. It was one part self-mythologising flex, one part tribute to the small but growing battalion of followers. *'You know our fans are insane / We're gonna blow this place away,'* sang James. *'With volume higher / Than anything today.'*

Kill 'Em All, and *Hit The Lights*, didn't turn Metallica into overnight stars – the album was either ignored or mocked by the metal press at the time. Yet those who were paying attention knew that it signified a change, one that would come to fruition sooner than anyone could ever anticipate with the advent of the thrash scene. With that came a baseline shift in metal itself – it got harder, faster, more vicious, more real.

But just as Metallica themselves had planted the seeds for thrash with *Hit The Lights*, so they were the first to outgrow it. Within 10 years, they'd gone from scrappy underdogs to the biggest metal band on the planet, and one of the most successful bands in any genre. And once again, where Metallica led, so many other bands followed.

"James and I had some ideas," said Lars in 2016 of *Hit The Lights*, the song that started it all. "We took those ideas and glued them together, heavied it up and made it fast, put some energy and some youthful punkish enthusiasm behind it, and out came this Metallica thing." **DE**

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METAL HAMMER

21 SAINT VITUS
Burial At Sea

(SAINT VITUS, 1984)

Bringing the LA doom instigators' debut LP to a crushing close, *Burial At Sea* boasted the slowest, darkest, creepiest riffs yet devised by man or beast. The blasting punk-metal mid-section rampaged like a proto-Autopsy, yet this heaving behemoth was present on pre-Vitus band Tyrant's first demo as early as 1978. Pushing back the frontiers of doom metal even while effectively scouting them out, *Burial At Sea* roughened, toughened and distressed the original Sabbath blueprint with stoner caveman energy and sinister atmospheres, reflected in the *Weird Tales* narrative about a pirate ghost ship. Dave Chandler's guitar crawled with spectral unease, siring the 90s/00s Electric Wizard school of occult psych doom, while the singular shuddering pipes of Scott Reagers bewitched the microphone with theatrical fervour and possessed abandon. CC

22 HELLHAMMER
Triumph of Death

(APOCALYPTIC RAIDS, 1984)

Venom opened the door to metal's dark new future, inspiring a wave of bands to take what they did and push it even further. Hellhammer quickly assumed the mantle of the heaviest (and most reviled) band in the world. *Triumph Of Death* was the most unpalatable noise unleashed by any band to that point. The Swiss trio – fronted by future Celtic Frost visionary Tom G Warrior – recorded the track three times in total, each version getting slower, longer and more nightmarish. By the time it made its official, non-demo debut on 1984's *Apocalyptic Raids* EP, it had mutated into nine minutes of droning, tortuous agony, turning metal from music for slamming beers to into a hallucinatory expression of a tormented soul. There had never been a metal band this audibly DIY before – it soon became clear that if Hellhammer could do it, so could anyone. PH

W.A.S.P.: controversy magnets

Hellhammer: utter filth

23 W.A.S.P.
Animal (Fuck Like A Beast)

(ANIMAL (FUCK LIKE A BEAST), 1984)

You've gotta love any tune that's so over-the-top that the guy who wrote it denied its existence for 15 years. As a song, *Animal* is heavy metal brutalism at its finest, based on rudimentary quarter-note chugs and simplistic power chord movement – albeit with a razor-sharp hook for a chorus. You would have to be living under a bridge of denial to think the song, and bloody saw-blade codpiece cover, was never going to stir controversy. It may have been dropped as the opener to the band's debut album, but sensation sells – its presence on US censorship group's the PMRC's 'Filthy Fifteen' list of records that no kid should ever be subjected to only turbocharged its infamy. By the mid-00s, born-again Christian Blackie refused to ever play the song again. But it seems he knows where his bread is buttered, as it ended up being dusted off for the band's 40th anniversary tour. KSP

24 CELTIC FROST
Circle Of The Tyrants

(EMPEROR'S RETURN/TO MEGA THERION, 1985)

The video for this early Celtic Frost signature tune was filmed in 1985 at the World War III festival in Montreal, North America's first extreme music festival. The earthmoving chaos put on display by the crowd's reaction to this track's sinister and measured plod (and operatic vocal variations), combined with bassist Martin Ain decked out in aristocratic, frilly stage gear, showed a band in transition. *Circle Of The Tyrants* is Celtic Frost's crowning jewel, not just because it's home to the band's most recognisable riff and best song of their catalogue, but because it was a bridge between Tom G Warrior's raw and unkempt Hellhammer-y past and all the avant-garde experiments to come, for Frost and all the countless bands they inspired. KSP

25 POSSESSED
Death Metal

(SEVEN CHURCHES, 1985)

Originally the opening title track on the 1984 demo by the Bay Area's most divisively extreme band, *Death Metal* ended up as the final killer blow on the teenage foursome's incendiary debut, *Seven Churches*, the following year. Although audibly in thrall to recent innovations by Venom and Slayer, the bulldozing relentlessness of the sheet-metal riffing and Jeff Becerra's sick, tormented rasp ratcheted the intensity way beyond workaday thrash tropes. This was a far darker, grislier mode of expression, judiciously signified by its far-sighted title. Essentially, Possessed were revisiting Black Sabbath's foundational concept: the musical equivalent of a scary movie. But instead of Sabbath's English Gothic folk-horror devilry, we've got an army of bloodthirsty

HELLHAMMER: PRESS/MARTIN KYBURZ. W.A.S.P: GETTY.

SLAYERRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!

Satanic zombies annihilating California to *'rule by Death Metal'* and *'bringing you nothing but strife'*. CC

26 CANDLEMASS
Solitude
(EPICUS DOOMICUS METALLICUS, 1985)

The cod-Latin title of Candlemass's debut album said it all: *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*. Where American doom as purveyed by contemporaries Saint Vitus and The Obsessed reeked of biker bars and nasty speed, the Swedes offered a more grandiose Northern European update of the original Black Sabbath template. As founder/bassist Leif Edling told *Metal Hammer*, "We wanted to make doom metal of epic proportions." *Solitude* very much lived up to that billing, its mix of slo-mo musical grandeur and lyrical, I'd-be-happier-dead desolation (actually inspired by nothing darker than a world-class hangover) sparking a strain of metal that was as ambitious as it was agonised. Woe never sounded so uplifting. DE

27 MEGADETH
Peace Sells
(PEACE SELLS... BUT WHO'S BUYING?, 1986)

Not content with helping invent thrash when he was still a member of Metallica, Dave Mustaine then went on to reinvent it with Megadeth. The monumental almost-title track of their second album rose above the perpetual chaos of the band's drug-addled existence at the time, slowing the genre's 100mph fury down to a hypnotic groove, then lacing it with a furious, combative lyric that took aim squarely at an establishment that looked down on people like Dave Mustaine. *'Whaddya mean I don't pay my bills? Why do you think I'm broke?'* spat MegaDave.

Megadeth: MegaDave's anger made for a hit

GETTY

At a time when hard rock's attempt at protest music extended no further than a brickie in make-up yelling *'We're not gonna take it!'*, this was stark social commentary. MTV certainly thought so – they used a snippet of the song to soundtrack their news bulletins, legitimising Megadeth, and by extension thrash, as the sound of metal's thrilling future. DE

28 SLAYER
Angel Of Death
(REIGN IN BLOOD, 1986)

Ensuring no taboo went unviolated, Slayer forced us to learn about the vilest excesses of real-world horror, describing the evil human experiments conducted by Nazi scientist Josef Mengele. Before *Angel Of Death*, metal's monsters were ancient myths or backstreet prowlers, but guitarist Jeff Hanneman's unflinching lyrics spawned Cannibal Corpse's exhaustingly baroque catalogue of death and torture, and Carcass's medical gore, plus a regrettable raft of edgelords getting it wrong. Additionally, with that bridge riff – sampled to a wider audience by Public Enemy's *She Watch Channel Zero* – Jeff invented the groove breakdown. It's Jeff's song, but drummer Dave Lombardo's contribution also urged metal to new levels of manic intensity with his lightning-speed double bass break, inspiring a trend for relentless metronomic kick blasts well into the 90s. CC

29 NAPALM DEATH

Scum

(SCUM, 1987)

With their debt album *Scum*, Napalm Death pushed the frontiers of noise back further than anyone could have ever imagined. The line-up that recorded this two-and-a-half minute grindcore landmark – singer/bassist Nicholas Bullen, guitarist Justin Broadrick and drummer Mick Harris – took in a disparate set of influences (Swans, Killing Joke, Siege, Metallica) and spat them out as something that was filthier, faster and bleaker than anything that had come before. The mainstream world was baffled and/or repulsed by its seemingly impenetrable din, but over time its revolutionary racket became fused into metal's DNA, in the process helping establish Earache Records as one of the most influential underground labels in history. Today, any band who profess to be remotely extreme owe a massive debt to *Scum*. Here, former Napalm Death guitarist Justin Broadrick looks back on the making of the seminal album.

"WE WERE DISENCHANTED WITH THE HUMAN RACE"

JUSTIN BROADRICK

***Scum* was such an important album. What do you remember about writing it?**

"I was a barely functioning 15/16 year old during my time in Napalm Death. Everyone else in the band was two years older, but what I could do prolifically was write music and create songs. I was writing the majority of the music, and Nic was writing pretty much all the lyrics. *Scum* was one of the last songs I wrote for Napalm Death, that is for sure [Justin and Nic Bullen left after recording Side A of the *Scum* album, with an almost totally new line-up recording Side B]. I would have written it in my bedroom in Shard End, Birmingham, being 16 and still living at home with my mum and stepdad at that point."

Did it feel different to earlier songs you'd written for Napalm?

"I felt my riffs and writing were essentially getting better, that was for certain. This was evident by the responses we were getting at our shows in that period. We, as a band playing these songs, had something special by this time."

***Scum* alternates between slow, sludgy sections and lightning-fast parts. What were the influences?**

"We were totally obsessed with Celtic Frost! Ha ha ha! That mid/breakdown riff is a direct

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Justin, Nic and Mick – babyfaced but brutal!

take on a Hellhammer song breakdown, changed very slightly as it progresses. The main slow riff was me trying to emulate *Am I Evil?*, the Metallica cover [of Diamond Head], combined with a variety of Black Sabbath riffs. The fast parts are all essentially a take on Discharge riffs, but sped up and perhaps 'noisier'. Also, Siege had seeped into the riffs there."

What did Nic Bullen and Mick Harris bring to the song?
"Everything, from Nic's vocal stylings, lyrics and bass playing, to Mick being able to reach speeds we hadn't heard before. Without Mick, that wouldn't have been achieved. Mick and I first rehearsed at his mum and dad's house, and we literally sped up every Napalm Death song I taught him. Mick's energy and fierceness on the drums was unrivalled."

Who was *Scum* aimed at?
"Nic wrote the lyrics, so he would be the best person to comment. But how I saw it back then was an attack against our overseers, those who chain us: those in power. We were both becoming increasingly disenchanted with the human race as a whole. I think initially we intended to inform/protest, but both Nic and I became more nihilistic, especially from this period onwards."

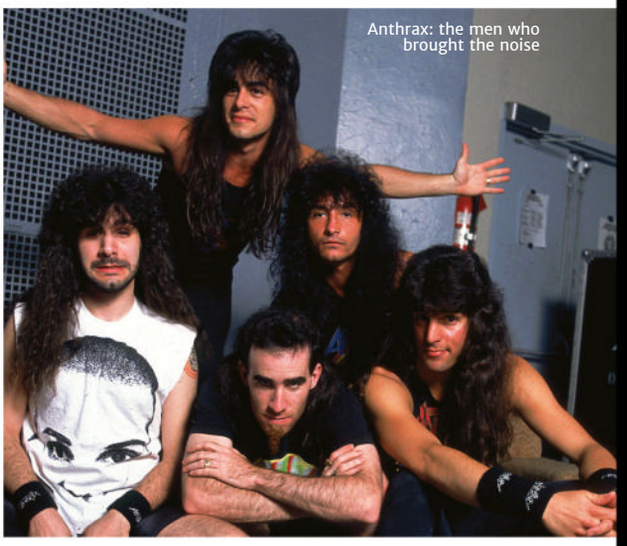
Do you remember playing it live for the first time?
"Not the first time, but the shows around that period were when people and audiences really started noticing us. There was a huge buzz."

How do you look back on *Scum* now?
"Very proud of it. I'm proud of the whole A-side of *Scum*. It's sad, but I lost the sense that it was my music for many years, while watching different forms of Napalm Death perform it time and time again and endless reissues of the album. But, I've felt like it's mine again; it's a part of my musical identity, my music as a 16-year-old. As a band, for a moment, we were amazing, and *Scum*, as a song, was the peak of that for me." DE

ANTHRAX: GETTY

30 VOIVOD
Killing Technology
(KILLING TECHNOLOGY, 1987)

Voivod's journey from rudimentary punk-thrashers to intergalactic prog metal travellers took just three years. The opening track to the band's third album, *Killing Technology* was another piece in a musical and conceptual puzzle that was slowly beginning to take shape. Piggy's upper register chord-slashing and morose progression dragged thrash metal kicking and screaming into the 23rd century. Away's restless drumming style made safety-pin-through-cheek punks out of King Crimson and Hawkwind. Snake delivered what was arguably his finest vocal performance, accenting his cautionary cybernetic tale with all the fervour of a maniac acting out a one-man play. With vocoders. Suddenly, metal stopped gazing at its white hi-tops and started looking starwards. KSP



Anthrax: the men who brought the noise

31 ANTHRAX
I'm The Man
(I AM THE LAW B-SIDE, 1987)

When Anthrax joined forces with Public Enemy on 1991's *Bring The Noise*, it was seen as a serious collision between worlds. But while the track brought hip hop and metal together, it wasn't the first song to do it. It wasn't even the first Anthrax song to do it, for that matter. That honour goes to 1987's *I'm The Man*, a jokey single B-side that walked just the right side of spoofing the genre (Anthrax guitarist Scott Ian was an authentic admirer of hip hop). But as drummer Charlie Benante told *Songfacts* in 2013, the track wasn't so much a piss-take as a planned collaboration with the Beastie Boys that fell through. "It's a scheduling thing," he explained. "We just never got it together because they were fuckin' *boom*! Blowing up. So we ended up doing it." *Bring The Noise* may grab the headlines, but this is where rap metal started. RH

Guns N' Roses: Sunset Strip's finest

32 GUNS N' ROSES
Sweet Child O' Mine
(APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION, 1987)

Welcome To The Jungle was nastier and *Paradise City* more anthemic, but *Sweet Child O' Mine* was the song that turned these feral Sunset Strip street rats into the biggest rock'n'roll phenomenon of the 80s and beyond. Where the rest of *Appetite For Destruction* stalked LA's grimy underbelly, this glorious not-quite-ballad presented Guns N' Roses as bad boys with broken hearts. Axl Rose's yearning vocal was given a leg up by that immortal Slash riff – one part wail of despair, one part cry of euphoria – before it pulled a 180° turn halfway through: *'Where do we go now?'* howled Axl, no longer the wide-eyed Romeo, as the music shifted urgently under him. Where previous singles had played to the hard rock gallery, this busted things wide open, giving Guns their first (and only) US No.1 and propelling *Appetite* to 30 million-plus sales. Rock's new era of dominance had begun. DE

33 LIVING COLOUR
Cult Of Personality
(VIVID, 1988)

Cult Of Personality is the stanchion for ridiculously catchy riffing, deep-pocket groove, thought-provoking lyrics (and a prescient sign of how humanity learns fuck-all from the past), the power of immediacy (it was written in one rehearsal), commercial success and racial acceptance in the ordinarily lily-white world of heavy metal. It's also the home of one of the craziest solos this side of NY's downtown jazz scene. In fact, that's where guitarist Vernon Reid honed his chops, and to hear him violate the song's brilliant ear candy with chromatic discord, unanticipated bends, Echoplex shred and cock rock whammy bar dives is still a mind-bending trip. KSP

34 HELLOWEEN
Eagle Fly Free
(KEEPER OF THE SEVEN KEYS PART II, 1988)

It's astonishing how ahead of its time *Eagle Fly Free* still sounds. Hamburg hotshots Helloween had already cornered the market in jubilantly supercharged Teutonic Maidenisms, but for the curtain-raiser on their breakthrough release they cast an industry-standard power metal template in iron. Symphonic backing tracks, relentlessly exuberant double bass drumming, emotional top notes, stirring sugary hooks, the obsession with eagles… the whole rulebook was chiselled from these five glorious minutes. An enigmatic, philosophical anthem flirting with social angst, singer Michael Kiske has noted this as a favourite to sing live, where the audience is often in tears at the song's surging motivational force. CC

35 BATHORY
A Fine Day To Die
(BLOOD FIRE DEATH, 1988)

Fresh from helping to define the first wave of black metal, Bathory mastermind Quorthon once again tore up the rules and almost single-handedly established Viking metal as a genre. He would plunge even further on subsequent albums, but it all started on *A Fine To Day To Die*, the eight-minute-plus centrepiece of *Blood Fire Death*. It featured a more epic and atmospheric approach, while retaining a blackened sense of aggression that would influence bands like Enslaved, Watain and everyone who has ever fantasised about pillaging an English monastery. Quorthon was also delving into his Scandinavian roots – the start of a journey that would eventually continue through metal-adjacent Nordic folk bands like Wardruna and Heilung. PT

36 MINISTRY
Stigmata
(THE LAND OF RAPE AND HONEY, 1988)

No one who heard the bouncy funk-pop of Ministry's debut album, *With Sympathy*, in 1983 could have foreseen Al Jourgensen's subsequent transformation into the Dark Lord Of Industrial Metal. But *Stigmata* – the opening track on their button-pushing third album – was where the Ministry we know and love today were born, and with it a distorted new strain of noise where metal met electronic music. Its tight riffs and claustrophobic, mechanised sound provided a seed of inspiration for everyone from Trent Reznor (who fashioned his own, sleeker version with Nine Inch Nails) to Fear Factory frontman Burton C. Bell (who was inspired to embark on his music career after hearing the song). But no one did it quite so filthily as this. RH

GETTY

Jane's Addiction (Annie the dog sadly not pictured)

37 JANE'S ADDICTION

Been Caught Stealing

(RITUAL DE LO HABITUAL, 1990)

The voice that introduces the song that invented the 1990s wasn't a human one. It belonged to Annie, a dog picked up from a rescue centre by Jane's Addiction singer Perry Farrell. It was Annie's rhythmic barking that ushered in their 1990 single, *Been Caught Stealing*.

"She was quite needy, so I brought her down to the studio that day rather than leave her at home," Perry told *Classic Rock* magazine in 2000. "I'm singing in the booth, Annie gets all excited and starts going, 'Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!' The fact that she ended up on the track was just pure coincidence."

Coincidence or not, it was the perfect opening hook for the song that sparked the alt rock revolution. *Been Caught Stealing* and its parent album, *Ritual De Lo Habitual*, brought the left-field into the mainstream, positioning these LA boho drug-monkeys as pied pipers for a wave of bands that followed.

Been Caught Stealing put a sideways spin on the funk-rock sound that the likes of the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane's themselves had helped pioneer. The song's lyrics found Perry and his girlfriend embarking on a shoplifting spree, picking up skirts and razors and laughing as they added them to a pile of stolen goods. The singer batted away suggestions that he was encouraging such activities – or that he was preaching much of anything in any of his songs.

"I didn't get into this to make sermons or set up structures for others to live by," he told *BAM* magazine in 1990. "My intent has nothing to do with teaching. It's to amuse myself on this completely boring planet."

"MY DOG GOT ALL EXCITED AND ENDED UP ON THE TRACK"

PERRY FARRELL

Released in November 1991 and accompanied by a kleptomaniac's fever dream of a video set in a real-life mini-market, *Been Caught Stealing* wasn't just Jane's Addiction's biggest hit to that point – it was also a watershed moment for the burgeoning alternative rock movement. Faith No More had bagged their own breakthrough hit with rap-metal anthem *Epic* earlier in 1990, but Jane's Addiction were something different: a full-on unfurling of rock's freak flag – something rubber-stamped when they headlined Perry's groundbreaking Lollapalooza festival the following year.

Lollapalooza proved to be Jane's swansong – the drug use that fuelled their creativity eventually tore them apart. But their success had uncorked the bottle and the genie was out. In September 1991, less than a month after Jane's played their final date, Nirvana released *Nevermind* and the steady drip of change became a torrent. The 1990s were truly underway. DE

GETTY

38 SEPULTURA
Inner Self

(BENEATH THE REMAINS, 1989)

'Walking these dirty streets with hate in my mind / Feeling the scorn of the world, I won't follow rules.' We've all been there, Max. Sepultura's first video clip, which featured heavily on MTV's *Headbangers Ball*, *Inner Self* saw this sainted line-up emerge as standard bearers for the South American scene, representing Brazilian passion and ingenuity like the heavy metal Pelé. *Inner Self*'s themes of urban alienation and nonconformist self-empowerment struck a resounding chord with a generation of young, disaffected working class headbangers, who quickly came to see these blossoming Brazilian thrashers as their relatable champions. The discreetly ambitious and sophisticated structure took in a variety of tempos and atmospheric quirks, although it was received most gratefully as a compulsive procession of pugnaciously direct 'keelar reefs'. CC

39 MORBID ANGEL
Chapel Of Ghouls

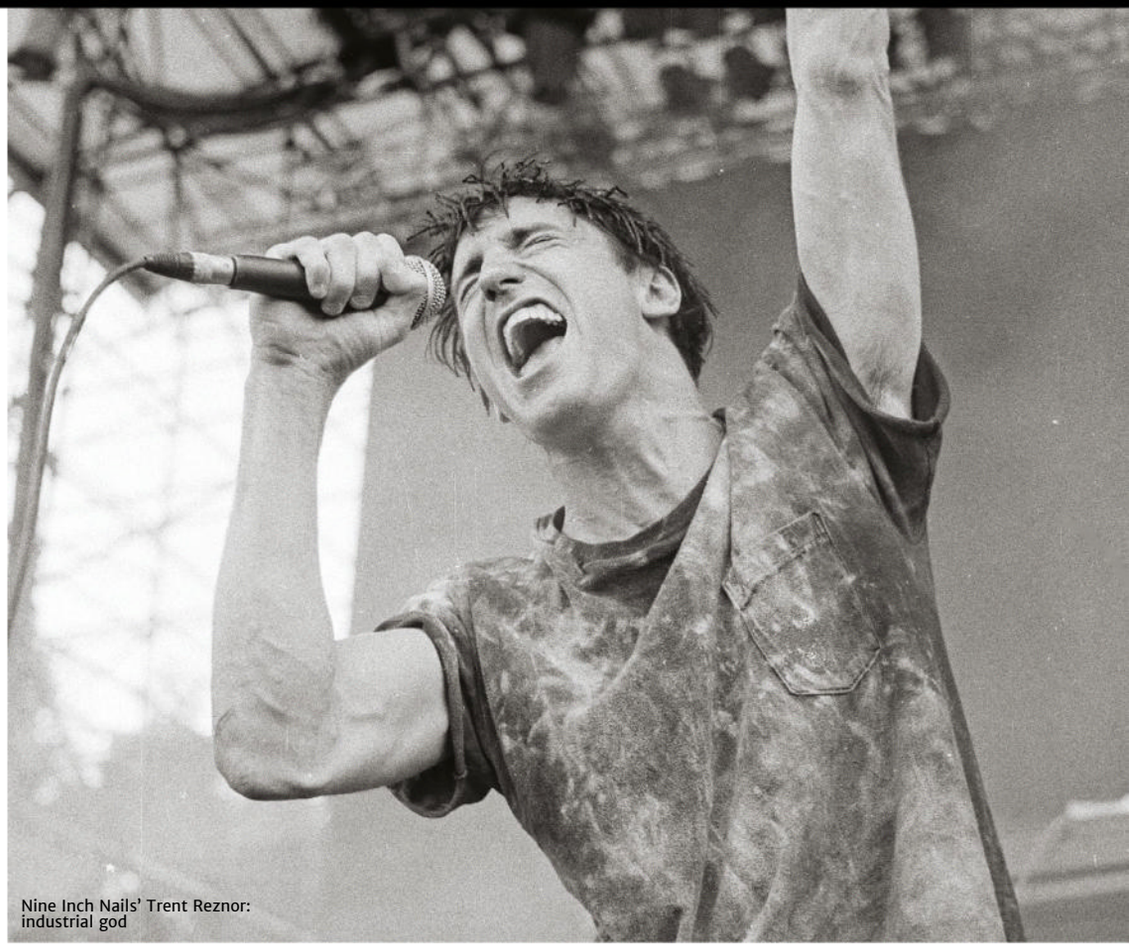
(ALTARS OF MADNESS, 1989)

Bursting open with that stabbing lead riff and metal's catchiest torrent of blasphemies, *Chapel Of Ghouls* was an early landmark song for death metal. Committed to tape on multiple demos in 1986, the precocious proficiency of its irresistible hooks and structural nous provided early evidence of true musical ingenuity in this scattershot subgenre. Opening the Floridians' aborted 1986 debut album *Abominations Of Desolation*, its eventual placing on *Altars Of Madness* as track one side two always felt like a printing error, such was the compulsive immediacy of its attack. Pete Sandoval's performance here raised the bar for superhuman athleticism in metal drumming, just as Trey Azagthoth's did for extreme guitar wizardry. The haunting choral synth melody, and priest-crushing lyrics, anticipated some crucial black metal tropes, too. CC

40 FAITH NO MORE
Epic

(THE REAL THING, 1989)

Faith No More bounced onto the scene with 1987's single *We Care A Lot* (itself a re-recorded and buffed-up version of a song from two years earlier). But it was *Epic* that turned these San Francisco mavericks into alt metal trailblazers. New vocalist Mike Patton offered percussive, rap-style vocals against anthemic choruses that helped the band nail a radio sensibility their original, Chuck Mosley-led incarnation lacked. "Things were changing," drummer Mike Bordin told *Metal Hammer* in 2019. "We were insinuating ourselves into the mainstream, taking up the charge from bands like Metallica." This new guard also featured the likes of Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane's Addiction, but *Epic* beat them all to the punch, bagging heavy MTV rotation when it was released as a single in early 1989, inadvertently acting as a precursor to the rise of nu metal half a decade later. SH



Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor: industrial god

41 NINE INCH NAILS
Head Like A Hole

(PRETTY HATE MACHINE, 1989)

For much of the 80s, industrial music was a wilfully confrontational collision of abrasive electronics, mutant dance music, white noise and the occasional squalling guitar. It took Trent Reznor's Nine Inch Nails to imbue the genre with a hook-laden pop sheen and push it into the mainstream. *Head Like A Hole* was an instant industrial anthem and a precursor to the nihilistic 90s that were on the way. It turned the awkward, introverted Trent into a reluctant crossover superstar, an icon for the dark and depressed, while also inspiring the industrial metal boom of the early 90s. But, even beyond that scene, the fact it's been covered by everyone from AFI to Miley Cyrus is proof of the breadth of influence and the seemingly never-ending longevity of the song. SH

Faith No More: alt metal trailblazers

42 GODFLESH
Like Rats

(STREETCLEANER, 1989)

There was a long way to go before Godflesh's Justin Broadrick and G.C. Green perfected the sound they themselves created, but their debut album, *Streetcleaner*, found the pair zeroing in on their unique presentation and style, and getting a handle on what was possible and where they wanted to go. And, by the sounds of opening track *Like Rats*, that was through a portal to a molten, industrialised Hades that apparently opened up on a destitute and abandoned Midlands factory floor. Despite it being one of the more pessimistically funereal and downcast entries of the Godflesh oeuvre (the hip hop-influenced beats are absent), and brimming with pained vocals, mechanised flourishes and abusive guitar discord, it set the stage for the introduction of a specifically British strain of industrial music to metal's lexicon. KSP

NINE INCH NAILS: GETTY. FAITH NO MORE: PRESS.

Jerry Cantrell, Layne Staley, Sean Kinney and Mike Starr were grunge pioneers

GETTY

43 ALICE IN CHAINS

Man In The Box

(FACELIFT, 1990)

Nirvana's *Nevermind*, Pearl Jam's *Ten*, Soundgarden's *Superunknown*: 1991 was the year grunge broke. Except the real breakthrough came a year earlier with the release of Alice In Chains's breakout single, *Man In The Box*.

If the likes of Nirvana, Mudhoney and Soundgarden had punk rock flowing through their veins, then Alice In Chains represented the metal wing of the Seattle scene. *Man In The Box* was as thick as molasses, taking a riff that would have done Black Sabbath proud and slathering it in fuzz and talkbox guitars, the latter reportedly inspired by producer Dave Jerden hearing Bon Jovi's talkbox-intro'd 1986 megahit *Livin' On A Prayer* on the radio when heading into the studio.

That was as close as *Man In The Box* came to anything remotely uplifting. *'I'm the man in the box / Buried in my shit'*, sang the late, great Layne Staley in that distinctive rich rasp, laying out the bleak, disillusioned worldview that would characterise the singer and his band.

"I started writing about censorship," the singer told *Rolling Stone* of the inspiration behind the song's lyrics. "We went out for dinner with some Columbia Records people who were vegetarians. They told me how veal was made from calves raised in these small boxes, and that image stuck in my head. So I went home and wrote about government censorship and eating meat as seen through the eyes of a doomed calf."

> **"IT INTRODUCED THE WORLD TO GRUNGE"**
> DAVE JERDEN

Released in January 1991 as the second single from the band's debut album, *Facelift*, *Man In The Box* picked up radio and MTV play – despite the video featuring some dark imagery, including the sight of a monk with his eyes sewn shut – helping push it into the Billboard Mainstream Rock Top 20. Its success got Alice In Chains on that summer's Clash Of The Titans tour, opening for Slayer, Anthrax and Megadeth. Such was the power of their performance that even Slayer guitarist Kerry King became a convert.

"They were the *Man In The Box* band and I never needed to hear that song again," he says. "It was all I knew because that's all MTV played. But we'd watch them, hang out… Layne was probably the best singer of our generation."

Propelled by the success of *Man In The Box*, *Facelift* was certified gold (for half a million sales) on September 11, 1991 – the first grunge album to reach that status. Two weeks later, Nirvana released *Nevermind*. While Cobain and co. would undoubtedly have done well anyway, the path was certainly cleared by *Man In The Box*. As producer Dave Jerden told *Metal Hammer* in 2002: "*Facelift* was where Alice In Chains found their style. And *Man In The Box* was the first song that introduced the world to the grunge sound." RH

Body Count: not on ex-President Bush's Christmas card list

KRISTIN CALLAHAN / AVALON

44 BODY COUNT
Cop Killer
(BODY COUNT, 1992)

Metal and hip hop had made great strides towards each other when Body Count arrived on the scene in the early 90s, but the idea of legitimate gangsta rap pioneer Ice-T launching a full-blown metal band was still unexpected. This was no novelty rap-metal mash-up – this was serious.

"I grew up in the days of Black Sabbath and Dio and all that kind of stuff," Ice says, explaining how he was inspired to form Body Count in 1990. "I liked the energy and I liked the fact that it was hardcore: 'This shit is crazy.' They're just trying to scare the shit out of people, right? So we asked the question: 'What's more scary than a fucking gun in your face?'"

Released in March 1992, Body Count's self-titled debut album was a chugging, brutal slab of aggro that drew from metal, hardcore and thrash. What separated it from other similar albums was Ice-T – this master hip hop storyteller spat out vivid, often OTT lyrics filled with brutal tales of gang warfare, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse and death.

Yet there was one song that stood out above them all: *Cop Killer*. Written in 1990, it had police brutality in its sights, especially that aimed at the Black community. *'I got my 12 gauge sawed-off / I got my headlights turned off... I'm about to dust some cops,'* snarled Ice-T, equally cartoonish and chilling. The chorus – *'Cop killer, fuck police brutality'* – left no doubt as to the source of its rage.

"It was a song that was written at the right time: Rodney King," Ice recalls, referring to the Black motorist who was filmed being savagely beaten by four LAPD officers in 1991, and the subsequent 1992 trial that saw all four officers acquitted, leading to six days of rioting across Los Angeles. "Shit was fucked up in LA. And my record was made a year before the riots. So it was a historical thing."

The Body Count album, featuring *Cop Killer* as its closing track, was released in March 1992, midway through the Rodney King trial. With racial tensions at an all-time high, the song captured the mood of fury within the Black community. Metal had rarely sounded as real or dangerous as it did here.

Predictably, the pushback from the establishment was vicious. Thanks to *Cop Killer*, Body Count became America's most feared and hated band. Then-President George HW Bush called the song "sick", and Vice President Dan Quayle called it "obscene". Dennis R Martin, the Former President of the National Association of Chiefs of Police, claimed the song had directly "been implicated in at least two shooting incidents and has inflamed racial tensions in cities across the country".

> **"THAT MOTHERFUCKING RECORD STOPPED THE WORLD"**
> ICE-T

Police organisations in the US called for the album to be pulled from stores. Even veteran actor (and gun rights activist) Charlton Heston got involved. At a shareholders meeting of Time Warner – owners of Body Count's label Sire/Warner Bros – the former *Moses* star read out the lyrics to *Cop Killer* and another song, *KKK Bitch*, in an attempt to shame the company into shelving the record.

"You know first hand what it's like to have a whole country after you," says Ice. "The President says your name, you got all these police officers all over the world hearing this one guy made this record about killing them, you go in the crosshairs. You're standing there. A lot of your people will run and hide, a lot of people will be afraid to back you up, but certain people will back you up. It really gives you a focus on them. You know who's with you."

But the pressure proved too much for Time Warner, and even Ice himself.

"I did feel really sorry for Warner Brothers," says Ice. "They were the ones getting the death threats and all the trouble over the song. So, I made the decision to take it off the album.

More than three decades later, you still can't find the original version of *Cop Killer* on any streaming services, but its legacy still looms large. It showed that metal still had the ability to become public enemy number one and be seen as a genuine threat to those in power. Even more importantly than that, it proved that there was a place for Black voices and experiences within our scene.

"The white establishment doesn't fear the Black artist when we sing to Black people – it fears Black artists when we sing to white people, and we start reaching their children," Ice surmises of the song's lasting impact. "That's the fear: you having the same enemy as me. When I walk out and say, 'Fuck the police' and a bunch of Black kids say it, they go, 'We expect that.' When I'm at a festival and I've got 20,000 [white] British people saying 'Fuck the police', then that's a problem."

It's a problem that metal has since embraced. Were it not for *Cop Killer*'s influence, it's hard to imagine we would have the revolutionary work from the likes of Fever 333, Zulu, Backxwash and many more.

"I don't know how you could make a record bigger than that," says Ice. "Shit, that motherfucking record stopped the world." SH

Paradise Lost: cross-pollination found

45 PARADISE LOST *Gothic*

(GOTHIC, 1991)

Throughout the 80s, metal and goth were two distinct and separate tribes, each one suspiciously eyeing the other. It wasn't until Paradise Lost released *Gothic* in 1991 that it became clear what a perfect fit they were for each other.

"It was very divided at the time," says Paradise Lost guitarist Greg Mackintosh, who founded the band in Halifax in 1988. "It was bizarre to me when I was growing up that I was into these dark kinds of music, whether it was metal or not, and you'd go into a club with everyone in their different corners hating each other. There were lots of fights and I guess we didn't know why. We were huge fans of Dead Can Dance and Fields Of The Nephilim, and we wondered why that wasn't crossing over with metal."

Paradise Lost's first album had been grimy yet conventional death-doom, but with follow-up *Gothic* they embarked on a mission to cross-pollinate – or maybe cross-pollute – these two worlds. Its opening title track placed gothic rock and church organ-inspired lead melodies in doom metal, and contrasted Nick Holmes' death growl with an angelic female vocal. Its impact was almost instant.

"BANDS TOLD US THEY HAD CHANGED DIRECTION BECAUSE OF *GOTHIC*"

GREG MACKINTOSH

"Lots of bands that started supporting us began to add those elements," says Greg. "Anathema did a cover of *Eternal* from the *Gothic* album before we went on and played it. Katatonia and The Gathering told us they were starting to change direction because we'd done *Gothic*. I don't know if they already had ideas and it was just because we'd taken that leap and tested the ground, but they definitely felt they had more courage in their experimentation because we'd done it."

Spearheading the trio of bands that became known as the Peaceville Three alongside Anathema and My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost became key architects in shaping the direction of European metal as a whole in the 1990s. But their very specific fusion of goth and metal could be heard in everything from Nightwish's gothic grandiosity to Him's sultry doom-pop. It's strange today to think of a metal landscape that never embraced The Sisters Of Mercy or Depeche Mode, while the sound Paradise Lost pioneered with *Gothic* remains a source of inspiration for bands from Unto Others to Zetra.

"Sometime in the late 90s it started to blur, and now I don't think there is a wall anymore," says Greg. "If we were in any way a small part in doing that, that's a good enough legacy to have on its own." PH

PRESS/PEACEVILLE

Nirvana landed and nothing was ever the same again

46 PANTERA
Cowboys From Hell
(COWBOYS FROM HELL, 1990)

The early 1990s was a tricky time for metal, but *Cowboys From Hell* introduced the one band that would keep the scene roaring through this turbulent period dominated by grunge and alt rock. "A lot of thrash bands are sort of limited in what they can do, and we always felt our musicianship allowed us to do more… the groove thing was something we didn't want to lose," Vinnie Paul said of the band's transformation from glam metal to something altogether gnarlier. Pantera would have a huge influence on metal in general, but the pummelling grooves first introduced in this song would be particularly evident in the slab-heavy riffage of such later pugilists as Lamb Of God, Devildriver, and Five Finger Death Punch. PT

47 NIRVANA
Smells Like Teen Spirit
(NEVERMIND, 1991)

With four power chords and a hurricane of drums, Nirvana changed everything. The Seattle band's 1991 breakthrough single-handedly defined the direction of popular music, capturing the teenage angst of a generation and putting grunge on the map. The entire hair metal scene, which had owned mainstream rock for a decade, was rendered irrelevant pretty much overnight, and when Nirvana's second album, *Nevermind*, landed mere weeks later, it kicked Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* off the top of the Billboard chart. "Nirvana didn't go to the mainstream," bassist Krist Novoselic would later declare. "The mainstream came to Nirvana." Alternative music has collided with the zeitgeist many times since, but nothing has turned the world on its axis like *Smells Like Teen Spirit* did. DL

48 SKYCLAD
The Widdershins Jig
(THE WAYWARD SONS OF MOTHER EARTH, 1991)

Few knew what to make of Skyclad initially. Formed by Martin Walkyier, formerly singer with UK pagan-thrashers Sabbat, their blend of metal with fiddle was a novel USP, but *The Widdershins Jig* was a boldly eccentric leap in the early 90s, when dystopian modernity was hot. As the perky piccolo unfurled its rustic trill over a rolling 6/8 rhythm, and the atmosphere took on a medieval village green vibe, it was clear Skyclad were frolicking in a world of their own. Ten-15 years later, a European folk metal scene would come alive in force, a carnival of hobbits, trolls and troubadours jigging around a dedicated circuit of pagan festivals. Every one of them owe this jaunty ditty a colossal debt, for blazing the trail in a hostile landscape. CC

49 SLEEP
Dragonaut
(SLEEP'S HOLY MOUNTAIN, 1992)

In the 1980s, plenty of underground bands built their sound on a mix of Iommi-worshipping riffs and heavy drug consumption, but it wasn't until the early 90s that it fully crystalised into a legitimate scene. In 1992, Californian trio Sleep released their second album, *Sleep's Holy Mountain*, and opening song *Dragonaut* was crucial in perfecting and distilling stoner rock. Guitarist Matt Pike's blissed-out opening riff is joined by a hypnotic groove, and bassist/vocalist Al Cisneros's woozy call to leave the human race behind by riding dragons toward the crimson eye. At the height of alternative rock's domination, it felt genuinely unique to embrace the classic traditions of early heavy metal and psychedelic rock in this way. *Dragonaut* would forever become the Rosetta Stone for a strain of mystical stoner doom for legions of weed-worshippers to follow. SH

50 NEUROSIS
To Crawl Under One's Skin
(SOULS AT ZERO, 1992)

The opening track of Neurosis's third album was an incendiary rite of transformation – both for the Oakland, California quintet themselves and anyone caught in its blast radius. Their sound was a progressive yet strain-at-the-leash take on hardcore punk, but here, an ominously tolling bell, a slew of sampled endtimes proclamations, chainsaw riffs and tribal drums became the tension-ramping prelude for a cataclysmic and revelatory new vision of enraged-Earth protest. With Steve Von Till and Scott Kelly's vocals sounding like they had erupted from a subterranean fissure, and all hell breaking loose around them, it was the seething birth throes for the entire post-metal movement, brewing DNA that Cult Of Luna, Amenra and countless other bands are still drawing from three decades on. JS

NIRVANA: GETTY

51 HELMET
In the Meantime
(MEANTIME, 1992)

The early 90s saw plenty of bands with little or no mainstream crossover appeal getting signed in the post-Nirvana major label gold rush. One such band was New York's Helmet, who perfected their grooving, piston-like bludgeon on the opening song of their major label debut, *Meantime*, in 1992. *In The Meantime* enjoyed respectable success, but the song's legacy is huge: within a couple of years, variations of guitarist Page Hamilton's unique, drop-D tuned, staccato riffs would begin cropping up on albums by Korn, Deftones, Coal Chamber and the rest of the nascent nu metal scene. While rap-rock crossover may take much of the credit for the inspiration of that movement, every nu metal guitarist spent the 90s desperately trying (and failing) to match the sound of *In The Meantime*. SH

52 KYUSS
Green Machine
(BLUES FOR THE RED SUN, 1992)

With this one song Kyuss put tongue to cigarette paper and prepared to roll a fat one that would be passed around a thousand stoner metal bands – slightly ironic, considering it was one of their faster tracks and the green machine in question is more about greed than weed. There was always a punk edge to Kyuss, but that fat bottom end and distortion you could practically chew served as the jumping-off point for a slew of imitators, as well as Palm Desert offshoots including Fu Manchu and Queens Of The Stone Age. More than three decades on, the direct hit of *Green Machine* still resonates through stoner, doom and any other scene that cranks monumental riffs and fuzz through an overdriven amp. PT

Kyuss: fuzzed-up gloriousness!

Dream Theater helped perfect prog metal

53 DREAM THEATER
Pull Me Under
(IMAGES AND WORDS, 1992)

Dream Theater weren't the first prog metal band, but they were the one that shaped the jagged, thrashing noise that 80s outliers such as Voivod and Watchtower had pioneered into something more approachable. Where 1989's Metallica-meets-Rush debut album *When Dream And Day Unite* had been a false start, follow-up *Images And Words* – featuring new singer James LaBrie – had its eye on the big prize. *Pull Me Under* was their breakout – an eight-minute prog metal powerhouse that balanced supreme-level musical chops with nailed-on commercial sensibility (and a lyric apparently inspired by *Hamlet*). It may have lacked the edge of the bands that came before it, and the ones that followed, but it remains a key staging post in the development of prog metal – one that marked out the genre's boundary lines for those that came after. DE

54 RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE
Killing In The Name
(RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE, 1992)

The point where mixing rap and rock went from an interesting curio of an idea into a full-blown revolution. Rage Against The Machine's incendiary anti-establishment diatribe fused huge hard rock guitars with seething, venom-laced rap bars. Its central message – *'Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!'*, howled with righteous fury by Zack de la Rocha – became a lightning rod for would-be insurgents everywhere, propelling Rage themselves to notoriety-fuelled success. The band might have sat somewhere to the left of Che Guevara, but this was a strangely unifying clarion call – something proven nearly two decades later, when fan power helped it steal the 2009 UK Christmas No.1 spot from whichever *X Factor* muppet Simon Cowell was trying to foist on us that year. SH

55 EMPEROR
I Am The Black Wizards
(EMPEROR, 1993)

With inscrutably powerful lyrics by bassist Mortiis, this definitive genre classic opened Emperor's landmark self-titled debut EP in 1993, but was held back to the penultimate spot on their first full-length album, *In The Nightside Eclipse*, the following year. Its haunting cadence has made it arguably Norwegian black metal's best-loved smash hit, somehow streamlining the tempestuous blizzard of sound to produce a sublime melody for the ages. "We wanted it to sound like a soundtrack to the most epic, violent, dark movie ever," Ihsahn said of Emperor's early impetus. "With our music we wanted to paint endless dark forests with a constant full moon." All of that visionary ambition turned up here, but allied to a structural nous and a set of harmonic hooks that rendered Emperor's abstruse philosophies more approachable – and more singable. CC

DREAM THEATER: GETTY. KYUSS: PRESS

Type O Negative: Black (No.1) humour

56 TYPE O NEGATIVE
Black No.1 (Little Miss Scare-All)
(BLOODY KISSES, 1993)

Launching a career in seductive gothic metal while sending up the whole concept, *Black No.1* felt like a joke Type O were just far too good at. The advance cut from an album that consequently went platinum, it was here Pete Steele found his optimum Type O voice, emerging like a goth butterfly from a hardcore chrysalis. No more the screaming caveman he'd been in street metal provocateurs Carnivore, this saw the frontman recast himself as a swooning love god with a killer line in dry snark, unleashing his tender vampiric croak over downright hilarious lyrics (*'She's got a date at midnight with Nosferatu / Oh baby, Lily Munster ain't got nothing on you'*). The deadpan revelry in goth clichés, the haunted-house organ, the arch romanticism – Dani Filth and Ville Valo owe it all to *Black No.1*. CC

57 CYNIC
Veil Of Maya
(FOCUS, 1993)

Veil Of Maya is where Cynic buzz-sawed through the tangled web of their roots. Early demos hailed them as promising Floridian death metal additions, but a year-plus of delays – at the hand of a shady UK promoter and Hurricane Andrew devastating their home state – had them return to the drawing board. The result was metal infused with progressive rock, jazz fusion, new age, vocals that ran the gamut from synthesised robotics to 4AD wispiness, and poetic lyrics about philosophy and religion. And despite being instantly heralded as a classic in some circles, other circles weren't as hospitable. "Everywhere we played that song, people were yelling 'You Suck!'," vocalist/guitarist Paul Masvidal recalled. "Then again, we were touring with Cannibal Corpse." In the process of creating a blueprint for the future of prog metal, alienation was inevitable. KSP

58 ENTOMBED
Eyemaster
(WOLVERINE BLUES, 1993)

We thought we knew what to expect from Entombed by the time of their third album, *Wolverine Blues*. Its predecessor, *Clandestine*, rendered the Swedish scene leaders' frosty death metal more accessible than the gnarly splatter of 1990 debut *Left Hand Path*. However, *Eyemaster*'s piercing feedback intro and the *Hellraiser* sample cued us into that crafty shit-kicking intro, and it was evident that some priorities had shifted. These were righteous pummelling riffs and flailing beats, sure enough, the verses pure grind and guitar melodies sinister as ever, but *Eyemaster* flat-out rocked. With raw, stripped-back punk energy, nailed-down garage jam grooves and Fast Eddie-joins-Slayer soloing, suddenly we had a death metal rock'n'roll band. Thanks to *Eyemaster*'s walloping impact, soon we had loads. CC

Entombed threw us a curveball, and we loved it

TYPE O NEGATIVE: PRESS. ENTOMBED: PRESS

59 KORN
Blind

(KORN, 1994)

Nu metal had many fathers. The groundwork had already been laid with the musical cross-pollination of Faith No More, the rap-rock polemic of Rage Against The Machine, and the concrete-heavy grooves of Helmet and Prong, among others. But for all those artists, the movement as we know it was birthed with the release of Korn's monstrous first single, *Blind*.

The pieces were all in place from the off. The sinister, skittering cymbals; that jagged, repeated slash of guitar and its counterpoint riff; frontman Jonathan Davis growling, *'Are you ready?'* like an invitation to a riot – which in a way it was. The song launched Korn and a thousand follow-the-leader wannabes into the musical mainstream, but its genesis goes back a little further.

A version of *Blind* had been written and played live in the clubs of California in the early 90s by Jonathan's pre-Korn outfit, SexArt. Future Korn guitarist James 'Munky' Shaffer first heard it when he and bandmate Brian 'Head' Welch saw SexArt play a club show in California.

"I remember thinking the riff was pretty cool – it was in a different key, but still really heavy," Munky told *Metal Hammer* in 2020. "It felt like new territory; like something I'd never heard before."

When SexArt split, Jonathan asked his bandmates if he could hang on to their creation.

"When my first band broke up, I asked my friend Ryan [Shuck, SexArt guitarist], if I could keep the song," the singer told *Hammer*. "The way we did it was completely different to the original version anyway."

How much of the song was actually rewritten and how freely it was given to Korn remains a matter of debate. Neither SexArt drummer/main songwriter Dennis Shinn nor Ryan Shuck were originally credited for *Blind* when it appeared as the opening track on Korn's self-titled debut album, released in October 1994. It was only after the pair took legal action that they were credited on Korn's *Greatest Hits Vol.1* compilation in 2004, as well as on subsequent releases.

For his part, guitarist Head claims the song had "many writers", while acknowledging that the former SexArt members wrote the original before Korn changed it up.

"We came in with the cymbal part, and Munky came up with the *'Dan-a-nan-na'*, then we decided after it kicked in we were going to bring it all right down. That was all Korn rewriting it," he told *Hammer*.

> **"WHAT WAS I GOING FOR LYRICALLY? I HAVE NO FUCKING IDEA!"**
> JONATHAN DAVIS

Whatever the exactitudes of the song's original composition, there's no doubting that it was Korn's delivery that made *Blind* such a visceral gut-punch of a song. Jonathan's vocal – scatting and groaning as much as singing – made it stand out even further.

"What was I going for lyrically? I have no fucking idea, brother!" he told *Hammer*. "This was just a stream-of-consciousness thing; it was all over the place. I think it's about being blind to your reality; blocking the shit out that you don't want to see or hear."

The original Korn version of the song appeared for the first time on the 1993 demo *Neidermayer's Mind*, produced by Ross Robinson. According to Jonathan, it featured a purloined guitar belonging to 80s shock rockers W.A.S.P., who were using the same studio.

"When W.A.S.P. went home at night, we'd sneak in and use their shit, so we'd be up all night," Jonathan told Rolling Stone. "And [Robinson] gave us wheatgrass to keep us up. Yeah, the demo of *Blind* was one of Blackie Lawless's guitars, I believe. Fucking funny, huh?"

Korn's self-titled debut album was recorded during fraught sessions at Ross Robinson's Indigo Ranch studios in Malibu. Jonathan was heavily using crystal meth, while the producer pushed him to his mental and physical limits. The version of *Blind* that opened the album was reworked once more from the cut on the *Neidermayer's Mind* demo.

It was also a slowburner. Initially released as a promo single, it never bothered the charts, and the album never rose above No.72 on the US Billboard 200 chart. It made a big noise in the underground, however, and served as an introduction to Korn and their new breed of metal.

"It was a powerhouse," Head recalled. "That was such an important song for us. We started playing it around Los Angeles, and we always opened with that song, because we were saying, 'Get ready, because this is a new thing, this is a new sound, you're going to be seeing some freaky-looking dudes going nuts onstage!'"

What those freaky-looking dudes could never have predicted was just how important their song with the tangled beginnings would become. When *Blind* was released, Korn were out there on their own. But it lit the blue touchpaper on one of the most successful scenes of the 1990s and early 2000s, re-routing the sound of metal in the process and establishing the band that released it as the figureheads for a whole new generation of metal. **PT**

David Silveria, Munky, Jonathan Davis, Head and Fieldy: nu metal's founding fathers

PRESS

Machine fucking Head brought the groove

60 CARCASS
Heartwork

(HEARTWORK, 1993)

Without *Heartwork*, the metal world would sound very different. You can draw a line from this song through melodic death metal bands like Amon Amarth and Arch Enemy (who were founded by Carcass guitarist Michael Amott), as well as metalcore acts such as Killswitch Engage and Shadows Fall. "With the music we try to catch the impossible: sophisticated brutality," said guitarist Bill Steer at the time, and that formerly unachievable mix is just what they managed to bottle. Not that it was an instant success. "I didn't meet anybody who liked it," said Bill, noting that they were labelled sellouts. It was certainly a different vibe from 1989's *Crepitating Bowel Erosion*, but time would prove their innovation to be a massively influential one. PT

61 MAYHEM
Freezing Moon

(DE MYSTERIIS DOM SATHANAS, 1994)

"Like how it looks when a thick heavy fog lies on the ground at funerals in Transylvania," was how Euronymous described his vision for how he wanted Mayhem to sound to *The Oath* zine, in an interview published posthumously, after the guitarist's murder by Burzum's Varg Vikernes (infamously here on session bass). Job done throughout the whole LP, but *Freezing Moon* stands as the apotheosis of early Mayhem's bone-chilling atmospheric power, and an all-time high for black metal songcraft at its most pungent. The 1991 recording with Dead on vocals (originally intended for an unreleased compilation) was *Freezing Moon*'s most influential form, dubbed recordings circulating around Norway's underground, and turning every adolescent death metal jam band into corpsepainted overlords of a merciless new black metal empire. CC

62 MACHINE HEAD
Davidian

(BURN MY EYES, 1994)

Pantera are rightly hailed as the saviours of aggressively minded heaviness in the face of grunge and alt rock, but Machine Head swiftly picked up the baton from them. The opening track from the Oakland outfit's classic debut album, *Burn My Eyes*, *Davidian* was an instant breakthrough. The song plugged into classic 1980s thrash – mainman Robb Flynn had been a member of Bay Area 'bangers Vio-lence, after all – but updated it for the new decade, bringing a monster groove and an unforgettable cry (*'Let freedom ring with a shotgun blast!'*, prompted by the fateful Waco siege a year earlier, a standoff between federal agents and the Branch Davidians religious group, in which more than 80 people died). On the back of this opening salvo, *Burn My Eyes* became Roadrunner Records' fastest-selling debut album to that point, proving metal's rock-solid foundations could weather anything. MM

At The Gates opened the way for a whole host of bands

MACHINE HEAD: PRESS. AT THE GATES: GETTY

63 AT THE GATES
Slaughter Of The Soul
(SLAUGHTER OF THE SOUL, 1995)

Rewind your mind to the mid-90s: the popularity of metal, and particularly death metal, was at a standstill, having suffered at the hand of the one-two punch of grunge and then nu metal. Sure, there was great stuff out there, but most people didn't care to know about what was bubbling in the underground. Once *Slaughter Of The Soul* started making the rounds, it became the song – and album – that cracked open a new world and turbo-boosted melodic death metal. Within half a decade, hardcore kids had picked up on it too, fusing its influence into the emergent metalcore scene and providing a jumping-off point for everyone from Killswitch Engage, Shadows Fall and Unearth to The Black Dahlia Murder. *'Go!'* KSP

64 TOOL
Stinkfist
(ÆNIMA, 1996)

With their first two releases – 1992's *Opiate* EP and 1993's *Undertow* album – Tool established themselves as a fascinating if unusual alt rock band. However, it was on their second album, *Ænima*, that they began to dispense with genre labels entirely. *Stinkfist* was their big breakthrough – musically and lyrically dark, powered by an elastic groove and Maynard James Keenan's alternately seductive and explosive vocals, it was simultaneously hypnotic, enigmatic and, if that title is anything to go by, pervy, dominant and subversive. A deeply unsettling stop-motion video got the song onto MTV, and suddenly the whole world's eyes were on them – this was progressive without being prog, arty without being up its own arse, shocking without being senseless. This was metal from the brain and the gut, an idea that everyone from Sikth to Tesseract would pick up and run with. SH

65 THE PRODIGY
Firestarter
(THE FAT OF THE LAND, 1997)

By this time, the lines between musical genres were questionably blurred, but the idea that a group from the UK rave scene could infiltrate the metal world still seemed pretty far fetched. The Prodigy had made steps towards heavier territory from their days as a pure dance act, but no one saw just how far they would take things with *Firestarter*. A tightly wound ball of big beats, squalling guitars and Keith Flint's sneering punk rock vocals, the song showed that dance music could be every bit as hard, as confrontational, and as subversive as metal. There were some dissenting voices, but they were drowned out by those embracing The Prodigy as one of our own. SH

The Prodigy: twisted firestarters

THE PRODIGY: GETTY

66 DIMMU BORGIR
In Death's Embrace
(ENTHRONE DARKNESS TRIUMPHANT, 1997)

1997 was a pivotal year for black metal. Enslaved, Emperor, Arcturus, Sigh and Solefald all put out albums that stretched its sonic possibilities, but no one was prepared for the audacity of Dimmu Borgir's third album. Newly signed to Nuclear Blast, they decided to team up with producer Peter Tägtgren at his emergent Abyss studio. The result was a huge evolutionary leap, both for the band and black metal as a whole, and the new, spacious sense of grandeur it ushered in was embodied by *In Death's Embrace*. Sweeping, cinematic and switching between different movements, its vast scope saw the album sell an initial, unheard-of 300,000 copies, enrage Dimmu's peers, become the template for symphonic black metal and drag the entire scene from the insularity of the underground. JS

67 RAMMSTEIN
Du Hast
(SEHNSUCHT, 1997)

In the 70s and 80s, German metal bands such as Scorpions and Accept had to play at being American or British to get noticed internationally. Rammstein were having none of it. The Berliners had spearheaded the Neue Deutsche Härte ('New German Hardness') movement with 1995's German-language debut album, *Herzeleid*. But it was follow-up *Sehnsucht* and monumental single *Du Hast* (a play on words – 'You Have' being a homophone of 'You Hate') that bent the rest of the world to their will. Its dancefloor-friendly, techno-industrial barrage had precedence – Slovenian provocateurs Laibach were doing this a decade earlier, and its riff had the distinct whiff of Ministry – but nobody delivered it with such ruthless, joyous efficiency as Rammstein. Linguistic differences meant nothing – *Du Hast* attracted the attention of everyone from Korn (who invited them onto their Family Values tour) to the producers of *The Matrix* (the song featured on its soundtrack). Modern German metal had entered the conversation. DE ▶

Refused: no longer ignored!

68 REFUSED
New Noise
(THE SHAPE OF PUNK TO COME, 1998)

Before they released their third album, *The Shape Of Punk To Come*, Umeå's Refused were a solid, if unremarkable, underground Swedish hardcore band whose members were growing frustrated by their lack of progress.

"We really weren't getting anywhere," recalls Refused vocalist Dennis Lyxzén. "We were playing punk squats and empty youth clubs."

The Shape Of Punk To Come was their final throw of the dice. The record, whose title riffed on Ornette Coleman's 1959 avant garde landmark *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*, was a sprawling, politically charged, electro-jazz-funk-post-punk masterpiece. Amid the dazzling, kaleidoscopic music, there was one moment of obvious commercial gold: *New Noise*, a slice of jittery, angular brilliance powered by a spidery, scratchy riff.

"We were playing the riff before it was even a song," Dennis says. "We just thought it was really cool. Did we think the song was something special? Well, yes and no. The reaction to it was always good, but you have to remember, we were mostly being ignored by everyone."

Despite the acclaim that greeted it in hip hardcore circles, *The Shape Of Punk To Come* largely continued the trend of being ignored. Soon after, Refused – who "just hated each other", according to Dennis – split with barely a whimper. But gradually, and belatedly, the unexpected started to happen: *New Noise* found an audience.

"It was odd to see that suddenly, when we weren't even a band, MTV2 started playing the video for the song," says Dennis, who had subsequently formed art-punks The (International) Noise Conspiracy. "I felt very detached from it at that time."

The Shape Of Punk To Come and its most prominent song were held up as touchstones by the wave of post-hardcore and emo bands that had emerged in Refused's absence.

"This little punk rock band that I used to be in was suddenly getting name-checked," shrugs Dennis. "But I wasn't really paying attention to that scene. We were a political, underground hardcore band. I think many of those bands misunderstood what we were and where we came from. All the same, if you make something which inspires someone to create their own spin on it, that's very pleasing."

It wasn't just the punk crowd that picked up on *New Noise*. The song has been covered by everyone from Anthrax ("An honour," says Dennis) to Crazy Town (the singer says he wishes he could have got hold of them to "tell them to stop"). More unexpectedly, the song has appeared in a string of movies and TV shows, from *24* and *Crank* to recent hits such as *The Bear* and *Triangle Of Sadness*.

"The irony never ceases to amaze me when I hear it in that context," says Dennis, who was part of Refused's 2012 reunion, with the band subsequently releasing two new albums. "When we wrote it, we were just another underground punk rock band, it couldn't have been further from the mainstream, but the song just has a life of its own now." SH

"*NEW NOISE* HAS A LIFE OF ITS OWN"
DENNIS LYXZÉN

PRESS/OLA BERGMAN

69 DEFTONES
My Own Summer (Shove It)
(AROUND THE FUR, 1997)

Following their 1995 debut album, *Adrenaline*, Deftones found themselves lumped in with the nascent nu metal scene. Realising the confines of the genre, the Sacramento crew made a deliberate attempt to extricate themselves from the likes of Korn on its follow-up, 1997's *Around The Fur*. Opening song and lead single *My Own Summer (Shove It)* did the job perfectly, showcasing an entirely new breadth of sounds and ideas, with Chino Moreno channelling his love of 80s soul-pop queen Sade on the slinky, sexy whispered verses, atop Chi Cheng's weed-wreathed, dubby basslines. With it, Deftones had drawn up a road-map out of nu metal, one that would be subsequently followed by everyone from Far and Glassjaw to Deafheaven and Loathe. SH

Deftones in 1997: nu metal? Nah, not for us, thanks

70 SLIPKNOT
Wait And Bleed
(SLIPKNOT, 1999)

Wait And Bleed was responsible for introducing an entire generation to a more extreme form of music, dragging metal kicking and screaming into the new millennium as it went. Nu metal had already brought heavier grooves into the mainstream, but Slipknot were always a band apart, and their self-titled debut was a chaotic ball of vitriol and hate. *Wait And Bleed* was their not-so-secret weapon; a song that maintained that malignant core, but sneaked it past the lines of defence under the cover of a roughshod melody and utterly infectious hook. To some extent it can be seen as a gateway song, but there's nothing wrong with that, and it paved the way for even heavier fare to reach a wider audience. PT

71 THE DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN
43% Burnt
(CALCULATING INFINITY, 1999)

As the 21st century approached, nu metal's boom-and-burst dynamics were heavy music's dominant sound. The antidote to this simplistic approach arrived in the shape of The Dillinger Escape Plan, who mashed up the technicality of death metal, the raw force of hardcore, and the speed and chaos of thrash, and took them to then-unheard extreme forms on their debut album, *Calculating Infinity*. The album's second song became DEP's calling card: *43% Burnt*. Part grindcore, part free jazz, part two-stepping beatdown, so unhinged and feral it was music that appeared to come from another universe. Not everyone could get their heads around it, but those who adored it were inspired to instigate the tech-metal and mathcore movements that came to prominence during the next decade. SH

Slipknot: the gateway drug for a generation

72 LIMP BIZKIT
Rollin' (Air Raid Vehicle)
(CHOCOLATE STARFISH AND THE HOT DOG FLAVORED WATER, 2000)

In a genre rammed with larger-than-life anthems, Limp Bizkit's *Rollin'* is nu metal's blockbuster. Released in 2000, it was the song that turned a scene that was already spilling into mainstream consciousness into a full-blown tsunami. Obnoxious, lairy and entirely unsubtle, *Rollin'* embedded Bizkit in 2000's pop culture. The track became the entrance theme for WWE wrestler The Undertaker, frontman Fred Durst went from underground menace to a cultural anti-icon dating Britney Spears and getting name-checked by Eminem, while the accompanying music video was an outrageous, big-budget splash filmed at the top of New York's World Trade Center, complete with a dance routine we'll all take to our graves. Twenty-four years later, there isn't a rock dancefloor immune to its charms. DL

73 ELECTRIC WIZARD
Funeralopolis
(DOPETHRONE, 2000)

Throughout the 90s stoner metal had emerged as its own colourful scene, but it was only a matter of time until someone brought it back to the darker tenets laid out by founding fathers Black Sabbath. *Funeralopolis* is a morbid inversion of Sabbath's *Into the Void*, not setting off from a ruined planet but embracing its death as Jus Oborn howls: *'Nuclear warheads ready to strike, the world is so fucked, let's end it tonight.'* This nihilistic concoction of drugs and the occult manifested in a distortion of tone so extreme it positioned this as actively civilisation-hostile music. It made Electric Wizard the most ripped-off band in doom for the next two decades, even if they delivered it with more spite than their bastard offspring. PH

DEFTONES: GETTY. SLIPKNOT: PRESSDEAN KARR

74 WITHIN TEMPTATION

Ice Queen

(MOTHER EARTH, 2000)

In the 90s, symphonic metal was more a glittering garnish than a scene in itself, something bands from Therion to Celtic Frost would sprinkle on their music to make it sparkle. And while the genre would start coming together into something more tangible towards the end of the decade, it wasn't until a few years later that a song would emerge to put symphonic metal on the map.

That song was Within Temptation's *Ice Queen*. A complete volte-face from the gothic doom of the Dutch metallers' 1997 debut, *Enter*, it appeared on the follow-up, *Mother Earth*, in a flurry of lavish arrangements and fairytale histrionics. Buoyed by vocalist Sharon den Adel's crystalline voice, it pushed metal towards a new frontier, quickly whipping up a buzz in mainland Europe. And while Nightwish would eventually emerge as scene leaders and symphonic juggernauts, at that time, the Finns were still very much in their power metal phase, having just released 2000's *Wishmaster*. Instead, *Ice Queen* can take credit for being symphonic metal's first major hit, pushing women to the forefront and influencing a brand new generation of bands.

Here, Within Temptation guitarist, and Sharon's husband, Robert Westerholt, looks back on the song that kickstarted symphonic metal.

What are your memories of writing *Ice Queen*?

"I remember the house we lived in at the time, at Sharon's parents' house. We had a studio in a little room, with a tape deck and eight-track. At that time, we really had this separated way of working; I wrote the music in there, then when I finished the track, Sharon would go into the room and write the melody lines. We were on a very tight schedule at that time for recording music. Our budget was not big. Sharon would have to record the vocals during the day, and I would write the lyrics of the song, which was to be recorded the next day, at night. It was quite a romantic way of working for a young band. Those were exciting times."

> **"THE *MOTHER EARTH* ALBUM HAD THIS MUSICAL INNOCENCE"**
>
> ROBERT WESTERHOLT

***Ice Queen* and *Mother Earth* was the first time Within Temptation embraced symphonic metal. How did that change come about?**

"It was a big step, but then again, also a logical step to toss away the grunts at that time. We originated from death metal, so for us, adding a female focus was something new. But then again, it felt a little forced, and we always tried to search for new things in our music. We knew we could do way more with Sharon's vocals, our songs became faster – before that, it was quite doomy and slow – and also, I think our songwriting skills had improved. So for us, it was like a whole music musical world was opening."

How did you find your new sound?

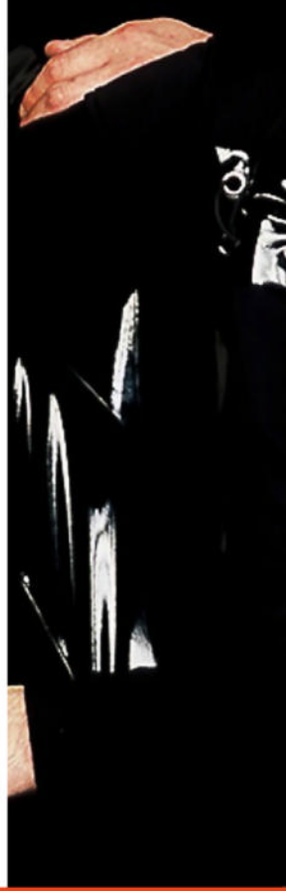
"*Mother Earth* had this musical innocence – we were searching for something with an edge and a bit of melancholy. We came from death metal, Paradise Lost were a big influence, but I loved Marillion and Sisters Of Mercy, and when you take those influences and mix them, you get your own thing. Also, soundtracks have always been inspiring thing for us. The soundtrack of *Braveheart* – not the film! That's the combination that took us in a more symphonic direction."

Sharon took a larger role in the songwriting process for *Mother Earth*…

"Her voice became more and more important, where at first it was really… I don't know… it was more the gothic, the doom vibes, and then it became… I think she became more important. *Mother Earth* and *Ice Queen* were really for the first time… when it really became her band, that she was in it now for a longer time. She really wrote everything, like the vocal lines."

What are your memories of the burgeoning symphonic metal scene at the time?

"It started in Holland at first. We really felt there was something boiling because every show that we did was selling out. And we didn't know why. [In 2002], we went to Netherlands festivals, like Lowlands and Pinkpop, and people were going crazy, it was



Within Temptation gave us symphonic metal's first big hit

PRESS

Within Temptation opened up space for women in metal

packed. We felt that we were doing something new, something people hadn't heard before, so we felt something was building."

Was there a moment you realised things were taking off for the band?
"Until *Ice Queen*, we had felt resistance from national radio, then on a video channel called The Box in the Netherlands, the video for *Ice Queen* became the most requested video. At a certain point we beat Britney Spears! Then the general radio couldn't ignore us anymore. They had to play it! Later on, *Ice Queen* spread to Germany and more countries in Europe and suddenly we were up there in the mainstream."

Speaking of the video, there's some wonderful 2000s CGI going on in the video for *Ice Queen*…
"Actually, we made three videos for *Ice Queen*, none of them we're really happy with. The original one, which broke through on The Box, was even way worse!"

You've written lyrics throughout your career about nature and the destruction of the world. And that stated with *Ice Queen*…
"At that time, the topic of nature was really on our minds – how we treat the world and how it should be better. We loved the adventure, the melancholic vibe, but also it hurt us to see that the beauty of the world was dying in a lot of places, very much a contradiction to the beautiful worlds of fantasy we created."

"SHARON HAS NEVER WANTED TO BE ONE OF THE GUYS"
ROBERT WESTERHOLT

At the time, Nightwish were doing their own thing in Finland. When did the two bands become aware of each other?
"We were aware of them because we were doing demos and landing on small, compilation CDs at the time, but we were so busy doing our own thing. I think we were more ahead in the mainstream when we broke through."

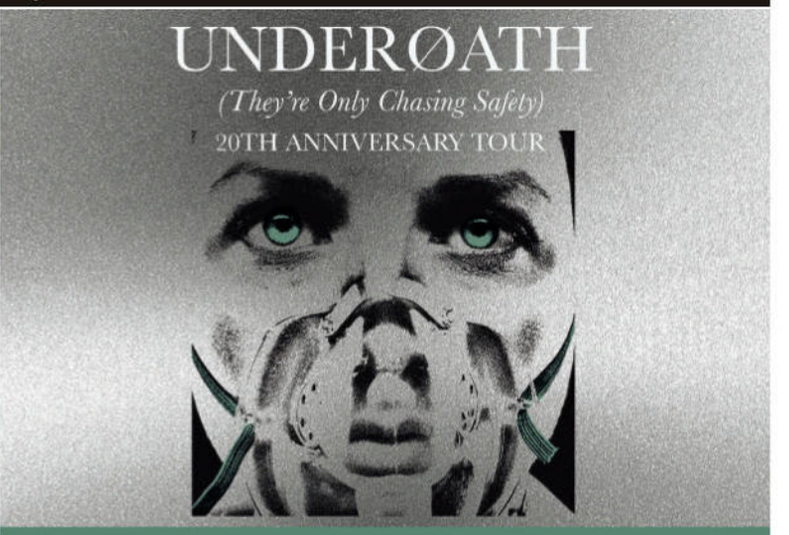
Did *Ice Queen* open doors for Within Temptation?
"*Ice Queen* was a huge kick-off. Because of *Mother Earth*, we got the opportunity to work with real orchestras afterwards on [2004's] *The Silent Force*. The orchestral parts on *Mother Earth* were all samples. From *Mother Earth*, we invested everything we had in making our shows look bigger and cooler."

Within Temptation and symphonic metal in general played a huge part in providing representation for women in metal. How do you feel looking back on that?
"I think it's a very obvious thing and a very true thing. I have a feeling that for a lot of girls and women, it was like, 'Oh, yes, finally, now we can participate as well.' It also goes together with the fact that, at the time, metal wasn't that melodic. It was bold to do different things again and to use a lot of melody. And the way women [in symphonic metal] dressed was also a big thing. Sharon has always embraced her femininity. She's never wanted to be one of the guys."

What is *Ice Queen*'s legacy?
"It was the kick-off for this long, long, long career. It has enabled us to do what we like and connect with so many people. We are grateful. It was something really fresh, new and exciting to people. I think sometimes it's really just luck that you're there at the right time. That's the legacy, the magic of that time, and that music." DL

GETTY

Academy Events present



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75 LINKIN PARK
One Step Closer
(HYBRID THEORY, 2000)

When Linkin Park released their debut single, *One Step Closer*, in 2000, they pioneered a new frontier in heavy music. While much of nu metal was wired by machismo and aggression, Linkin Park vocalist Chester Bennington sang about anxiety, depression and abuse, and their mash-up of razor-sharp metal, electronics, rap and pop sensibilities was more revolutionary than the band were given props for at the time. Every sound-blurring artist today, regardless of genre, owes *One Step Closer* a debt. In 2020, Mike Shinoda told *Hammer* how the track and its parent album, *Hybrid Theory*, broke down tribal attitudes towards music: "If you asked somebody what they were listening to they'd say, 'Rock. I listen to hip hop. I listen to jazz.' It wasn't until five years later they would say, 'Everything.'" DL

76 OPETH
The Drapery Falls
(BLACKWATER PARK, 2001)

The Drapery Falls was the sound of death metal's boundaries breaking. Though the genre had grown increasingly experimental throughout the 90s – thanks to the likes of Atheist, Death and even Opeth themselves – this song hoisted it completely out of blastbeating hellscapes and into densely textured excellence. The fourth song on the Swedes' breakthrough LP *Blackwater Park* is as much an acoustic meander as an all-guns-blazing attack, its 11 minutes weaving through brutality and bittersweetness, metal and folk. As a result, *The Drapery Falls* and *Blackwater Park* courted acclaim not just from diehard metalheads, but prog connoisseurs and old-school rock aficionados alike – no one had heard anything quite as meticulously honed yet accessible as what Opeth conjured up here. MM

Linkin Park: mash-up masters

77 CONVERGE
Concubine
(JANE DOE, 2001)

At the turn of the millennium, Converge were a well-respected but ultimately underground hardcore band from the fertile Boston scene. There was no warning they were about to raise the bar for the genre, but when *Jane Doe* arrived the following year, they did exactly that. Bringing together new sounds, ideas and visuals to the world of metallic hardcore, this was a lacerating noise driven by heartache and emotional carnage. Opener *Concubine* captured more pain, rage and chaos in its one minute and 19 second running time than most bands did in their entire career, helping turn Converge into standard-bearers for a new type of hardcore – one that wore its pain, hurt and frustration as clearly as the ink on its arms. SH

78 SYSTEM OF A DOWN
Chop Suey!
(TOXICITY, 2001)

'Wake up / Grab a brush and put a little make-up...' More than 20 years after its release, *Chop Suey!*'s head-scratching opening mosh call is as deranged and cryptic as ever. By 2001, nu metal had become safe, formulaic, repetitive. By contrast, System Of A Down were surreal and viscerally, radically political. Their most indelible song proved nu metal could be twisted into new shapes... and that downright weirdness could cut through the noise. *Chop Suey!*, the lead single from their second album, *Toxicity*, was an instant MTV hit, turning System into a megawatt, arena-headlining band – and one that wasn't afraid to speak truth to power (Serj Tankian's essay, *Understanding Oil*, criticising US political interests in the Middle East, caused an inordinate amount of trouble for System post 9/11). *Chop Suey!*'s enduring power remains – it's clocked up 1.3 billion views on YouTube and 1.2 billion streams on Spotify – proof that weirdness can sometimes win. DL

79 MASTODON
March Of The Fire Ants
(REMISSION, 2002)

Watching an unknown Mastodon open for High On Fire at Camden Underworld in summer 2003 was one of those rare moments of transcendent wonder. Everyone was flayed to the wall by the sheer force erupting off the stage, but this big gun was the most devastating volley of all. Although a slower, more tuneful groove than the rest of their debut album, *Remission*, every quirk of *March Of The Fire Ants*' body-buckling prog-sludge hypnosis raised the heat in the room, an experience increasingly replicated in fervid sweatboxes all over the world. Result: sludge bands got proggier, prog bands got sludgier, a wave of inspired new artists emerged circa 2002-5 (Baroness, Kylesa and Black Tusk from Mastodon's home state of Georgia, plus Oregon's Red Fang and Florida's Torche), and the drop-A tuning started turning up more in metal songs. CC

Opeth: proggy perfectionists

LINKIN PARK: PRESS/BRAD MILLER. OPETH: PRESS

Killswitch Engage sparked the metalcore revolution

GETTY

80 KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

My Last Serenade

(ALIVE OR JUST BREATHING, 2002)

In 2002, metal needed a new set of heroes. While nu metal's success was inarguable, it had stifled the creativity of the scene as a whole, funnelling it down a narrow channel towards a predictable-sounding end point. Unexpectedly, metal's salvation would come from the world of hardcore.

While the likes of Korn and Limp Bizkit were wreaking havoc across MTV and in the pages of the music press, metallic hardcore bands were blossoming in sweatboxes across America. One of those was Killswitch Engage, whose members had done time on the Boston scene in early metalcore bands Overcast, Aftershock and Nothing Stays Gold.

"I don't think any of us had stars in our eyes," singer Jesse Leach told *Revolver* in 2022. "We were just local kids from the northeast who started to catch a little bit of momentum. In my mind I thought we'd play in front of 300 kids a night and it'll eventually fizzle out like most hardcore bands do."

My Last Serenade would change all that. Appearing on KSE's second album, 2002's *Alive Or Just Breathing*, it instantly marked out the band as one to pay attention to, and suggested that something new was brewing just outside metal's nu metal-saturated mainstream.

"The song didn't really stand out in the writing process," guitarist Adam D told *Hammer*. "It was when we took it to the label and they started freaking out about it…"

That reaction is understandable. Not only did its grooves snap with a relatability that would allow fans of 90s metal to transition into this new era, but factoring in the gutsy melodies of Maiden and Dio created a best-of-both-worlds effect, reminding us all what a chorus was capable of.

My Last Serenade became a flagship anthem not just for KSE, and but for the emerging wave of US bands collected together under the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal umbrella.

"It showed that we were becoming something that we never really could have imagined," says Adam, who went on to produce records by the likes of Unearth and Killswitch acolytes Parkway Drive. "It was certainly the song that kicked off our career in terms of what we went on to do."

It did more than that. Two decades later, metalcore still thrives in various guises, having usurped other forms as the base component of much popular metal. While metalcore has changed a lot since 2002, *My Last Serenade* was the song that woke people up to this revolutionary sound. PH

"THE SONG DIDN'T STAND OUT DURING THE WRITING PROCESS"

ADAM D

81 EVANESCENCE
Bring Me To Life
(FALLEN, 2003)

Evanescence's debut single, *Bring Me To Life*, turned vocalist Amy Lee into a megastar. Arriving in 2003, when mainstream music was dominated by hyper-masculine men and overly sexualised pop stars, with her billowing long skirts, corset tops, arm socks and steely self-confidence, Amy redefined what a female artist could be, becoming a role model for millions of misfits and dreamers everywhere. Despite its crunchy guitars and a rapped verse, courtesy of 12 Stones' Paul McCoy – which Amy has since said she was forced to add by their label – *Bring Me To Life*'s cobwebby, goth fragility also brought something fresh to nu metal's dick-swinging party, extending the mainstream's flirtation with the genre for a little longer – as of 2019, it's sold more than 3 million copies and has passed more than a billion streams on YouTube and Spotify. DL

Evanescence: Amy Lee was a breath of fresh air in the genre

82 ARCH ENEMY
We Will Rise
(ANTHEMS OF REBELLION, 2003)

We Will Rise was a huge song, not only for Arch Enemy but for the new generation of 21st-century melodic death metal they spearheaded. Guitarist Michael Amott had already laid down the melodeath blueprints with Carcass, while Arch Enemy themselves had already made three albums with singer Johan Liiva, but neither they nor anyone else had made an anthem quite like this. As well as propelling the genre as a whole to greater heights and popularity, it provided a bigger platform for Angela Gossow – a hugely influential figure and one of the first prominent female vocalists to not only try but absolutely nail an extreme metal style. "Her emergence as a metal vocalist was, without hyperbole, revolutionary," Svalbard's Serena Cherry told us recently, and we're not arguing. PT

Nightwish found stardom with *Nemo*

83 AVENGED SEVENFOLD
Unholy Confessions
(WAKING THE FALLEN, 2003)

As metalcore usurped nu metal as heavy music's dominant force, Avenged wasted no time in laying bare their grand ambitions. Jamming in twin guitar leads, harmonised vocals and Dimebag-sized grooves, *Unholy Confessions* gave the Orange County gang their breakthrough moment and injected metalcore with some much-needed heavy metal thunder. Impressive, given that the band didn't even write the song together. "We all wrote in separate rooms," revealed M. Shadows years later. "It's kind of like our *Hit The Lights*. There's no science behind it, it's just what we do!" The band are a little dismissive – "I wouldn't say it's a well-written song," confessed the frontman – but make no mistake about it: *Unholy Confessions* put Avenged Sevenfold on the map, and the future of metal in their hands. MA

84 NIGHTWISH
Nemo
(ONCE, 2004)

Nightwish didn't invent symphonic metal, but alongside peers Within Temptation and Epica, they popularised it and packaged it to the masses. By 2004, the Finns had already established themselves as a major player in Europe, but with the sumptuous *Nemo*, they broke through on an unprecedented level. No longer a niche concern in the geeky corners of the metal world, symphonic metal, in all its lavish, overwrought glory revelled under a global spotlight. *Nemo*'s fantastical magic, sparkling piano refrain and stirring melody has endured – it's still the band's best-known song – but its lasting image comes via its gothic music video, and then-singer Tarja Turunen singing in the snow in a blood-red coat. *Nemo* showed metal at its most fragile and beautiful. DL

85 TRIVIUM
Pull Harder On The Strings Of Your Martyr
(ASCENDANCY, 2005)

It seems like metal has been searching for the 'New Metallica' ever since Metallica released *Kill 'Em All*. When Trivium released their second album, *Ascendancy*, in 2005, these young Florida metalheads had a valid claim to the title. This was the sound of a superstar metal band being born, exemplified by the album's lead single, *Pull Harder On The Strings Of Your Martyr*. Melding vintage thrash riffs, huge arena rock hooks and metallic hardcore across five perfect minutes, its mix of classic and contemporary won over old school cynics and turned a whole new generation of kids into diehard metal fans. Their performance of the song at Download in 2005 also created one of the most iconic metal moments of the 21st century. SH

EVANESCENCE: PRESS. NIGHTWISH: PRESS

Bullet For My Valentine: homegrown heroes

86 ALCEST
Le Secret

(LE SECRET, 2005)

When black metal masters such as Darkthrone, Emperor and Mayhem were pushing heavy music to new extremes, the idea of the genre gelling with shoegaze would have seemed laughable. Yet in 2005, Stéphane 'Neige' Paut used Alcest to pull the atmospheric side of metal's most satanic style to the forefront, having been influenced equally by Cradle Of Filth and Slowdive. *Le Secret*, the title track of the French band's first EP, spent 13 minutes offsetting metallic aggression with lush-sounding relief. Though the recording was incredibly raw, it built a contrast that Alcest perfected on 2010 masterpiece *Écailles De Lune*. Deafheaven later brought blackgaze to broader American audiences with 2013 standout *Sunbather*, but diehards know the sound was truly born deep in the south of France. MM

87 BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE
4 Words (To Choke Upon)

(THE POISON, 2005)

With Killswitch, Avenged, Trivium et al continuing the US dominance of 21st century metal, it felt like the UK was long overdue a clap back at our Stateside cousins. That clap back came courtesy of a former nu metal group from Bridgend, South Wales who once laboured under the unfortunate name Jeff Killed John. With *4 Words*, Bullet For My Valentine officially announced themselves as the biggest British metal band in a generation. One of the first songs the band wrote under their new name, the track captured Matt Tuck's growing frustrations at failing to make headway in the music industry – "It was having that moment to say to people that doubted us and hated us, 'Look at me now!'" the frontman told *Rock Sound*. A ripping, polished heavy metal anthem, it ensured the UK was finally back at the races. MA

Dragonforce: power metal bosses

88 DRAGONFORCE
Through The Fire And Flames

(INHUMAN RAMPAGE, 2005)

European power metal had already produced plenty of Earth-shattering anthems by 2005, but what Dragonforce did here was to distil all the genre's magic and madness, winch it to its dizziest pinnacle, then put it in more ears than anyone ever imagined (a quarter-billion downloads and counting). Three years earlier they were supporting Virgin Steele at a half-full Camden Underworld, but when this platinum-selling single was rolled out across the *Guitar Hero* franchise, Dragonforce exploded the horizons of countless unsuspecting youths worldwide. A million metal seeds were planted, coming to fruition a decade later with an ascendant crop of hyper-skilled virtuosos, literally schooled in the intricacies of this song. CC

BFMV: PRESS. DRAGONFORCE: PRESS

Tesseract: go big or go home

89 TESSERACT
Concealing Fate

(CONCEALING FATE, 2010)

As opening statements go, few come more audacious than Tesseract's *Concealing Fate*. First released as an EP in 2010, and later appearing as the fulcrum of the band's debut 2011 album, *One*, the track was the progressive metallers' first official release and landed as a perfectly realised statement of intent – all six parts and 27 minutes of it. "We were just fucking around and seeing what worked," recalls bassist Amos Williams. "It was almost as if we were hitting our magnum opus, to use a bullshit term, creating this epic, long piece which we had no fucking right to do. Maybe we were looking at artists such as Pink Floyd and thinking, well, they can do these huge things…"

"IT PROVED YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT"
AMOS WILLIAMS

Meticulously crafted and mathematically complex, muscular and beefy, yet majestically melodic, *Concealing Fate* caused an immediate buzz, giving a new generation of tech metal fans their own heavyweight to rally behind, alongside luminaries Meshuggah, Textures and Sikth. While those bands had been creating cutting edge metal for years, Amos believes Tesseract arrived at exactly the right time, with the right sound to push the tech metal/djent wave further.

"I do almost feel if Sikth and Textures came along 10 years later, they might have had a very, very different career," says Amos. "They were way, way ahead of the curve. You could argue that those bands walked so we could run."

Concealing Fate opened the door for Tesseract to take progressive metal in new directions.

"We were really messing around with all these ideas, bringing in percussive elements that aren't necessarily a part of the Meshuggah or Textures sound," says Amos. "All of a sudden, you've got a bass player who's slapping, and then a guitarist who's also slapping, and then a drummer who's playing jazz notes."

What also set them aside was Dan Tompkins, whose emotive clean vocals gave the band a completely different edge to their contemporaries.

"We felt quite early on that we weren't going to be a harsh, screaming, heavy vocal band, and we wanted more melodic elements," continues Amos. "We are into Pink Floyd. We were heavily into Jeff Buckley. Then when we started working with Dan, he's bringing in influences like Duran Duran."

It's a sound that has confirmed Tesseract as one of the most influential bands of the last decade. The ambition, creativity and genre-bleeding tech they pioneered with *Concealing Fate* can be heard in the very bones of metal right across the spectrum, rippling through the juddering riffs of everyone from Architects to Northlane, Spiritbox to Sleep Token. It's a legacy Amos is proud to embrace.

"It proved you can do what you want," he says of *Concealing Fate*'s lasting impact. "You can be an obnoxious young band and play a 27-minute track as your first release. Don't think that there's a cookie cutter mould for what you should be doing. That's what I've always believed and I really hope that is what other people get from Tesseract." DL

PRESS/KRISTELL GATHOYE

90 MESHUGGAH
Bleed

(OBZEN, 2008)

It's difficult to narrow down which of Meshuggah's songs was most responsible for causing noticeably seismic shifts in the world of metal. Meshuggah had turned thrash upside down with *Contradictions Collapse*, had created their own polyrhythmic universe on *Destroy Erase Improve*, and started the whole djent thing along the way. By the time *Bleed* appeared, the band were already existing in their own stratosphere with at least 20 songs that had already altered the course of extreme music. *Bleed*'s subtle, slithering melody chromatically slinking in the background snake-charmed punters and gave the song a wavy sensibility that thousands of copycat bands have yet to figure out. *Bleed* gave soul to the machine. KSP

91 THE DEVIL'S BLOOD
River Of Gold

(COME REAP, 2008)

"Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it," Winston Churchill famously once said. Drawing influence from the stranger corners of occult rock – Coven, Black Widow and Jacula – and attaching it to the likes of Mercyful Fate and various stops along Iron Maiden's discography, Dutch magicians The Devil's Blood took those words to heart. The result was *River Of Gold*. The second track on their debut EP, its galloping riff, propulsive bass and soaring vocals opened the floodgates for a torrent of esoterically inclined retro rock, making it cool for the likes of Uncle Acid And The Deadbeats, Lucifer, Blood Ceremony and Tribulation to dust off their vintage clothes and copies of the *Necronomicon* as old metal was shifted towards fantastical new(-ish) realms. KSP

92 WATAIN
Malfeitor

(LAWLESS DARKNESS, 2010)

No one really expected black metal to win back the notoriety it cultivated during the early and mid-90s, yet Watain reignited the sense of danger that surrounded it. Under the visionary leadership of Erik Danielsson, they asserted the genre as both ceremonial exhibition and all-encompassing outlaw lifestyle, giving the underground renewed conviction in the power of Satan, blood and rock'n'roll. Crucially, with *Malfeitor* they also made it utterly catchy, turning in a latter-day black metal classic that gallops like it's a 1980s Maiden standard. They won a Swedish Grammi for parent album *Lawless Darkness*, laying the groundwork for black metal to enter its fourth decade against all the odds. PH

WILL IRELAND

Bring Me The Horizon: metalcore standard-bearers

93 BRING ME THE HORIZON
Shadow Moses

(SEMPITERNAL, 2013)

More than a decade after its release, Bring Me The Horizon's fourth album still casts a long shadow. Spawning a ridiculous number of copyists, it split metalcore into two distinct eras: pre-*Sempiternal* and post-*Sempiternal*. Its influence can be heard everywhere, from the juddering grooves of Architects to Bad Omens' melodic fire. *Shadow Moses*, the album's lead single, was a revelation, incorporating a gargantuan riff with a flood of emotion and electronics in a way that had never been done before, all the while staying true to the grit and aggression of the genre – a sound so omnipresent, it's now part of the very fabric of modern metal. Today it remains the gold standard for metalcore, and sounds just as fresh as the day it first landed. DL

94 WARDRUNA
Helvegen

(RUNALJOD - YGGDRASIL, 2013)

With *Helvegen*, Wardruna paved the way for a whole array of musical acts occupying that strange realm where metal and dark, primal folk overlap. Contemporaries Heilung, hybrid black metal project Myrkur, and relative newcomers like Kati Rán and Suldusk have all followed in their footsteps to some extent. A lot of metal bands have played with folk themes and motifs, but *Helvegen* took things to a far deeper, more elemental and emotionally resonant space, with a ritualistic feel and the meters of Old Norse poetry. It's also worth celebrating the fact that the progressive Wardruna, are reclaiming the runic symbols and Nordic mythology that had been co-opted by the darkest corners of the metal and neo-folk scenes, as well as neo-Nazis worldwide. PT

Babymetal: sorry, elitists

95 BABYMETAL

Gimme Chocolate!!

(BABYMETAL, 2014)

If elitists were tearing their hair out at the likes of Ghost, Bring Me The Horizon and Limp Bizkit being considered 'metal', then they might as well have just reached for the clippers for this one. The sight of three young Japanese girls rocking choreographed moves and singing sugary-sweet, J-pop-infused choruses about chocolate over heavy metal riffs was as shocking as it was delightful. Babymetal hadn't just broken the mould for metal, either; they'd given the West a fuller glimpse into the uniquely Japanese phenomenon of idol culture, and given the cutesy world of Kawaii a bigger global platform than ever.

Overseen by band mastermind and producer extraordinaire, Key 'Kobametal' Kobayashi, Babymetal were unlike anything our world had seen before: equal parts hyper-polished girl band and full-on heavy metal experience, with their mysterious Kami Band backing musicians as formidable as any 'proper' metal band you could name. Cynics moaned, but with the likes of Rob Halford, Metallica and Corey Taylor throwing in their support, the trio quickly transcended their 'gimmick' tag to become a legitimate force in the modern metal landscape.

> **"I WANTED PEOPLE TO ASSOCIATE JAPAN WITH METAL"**
>
> KOBAMETAL

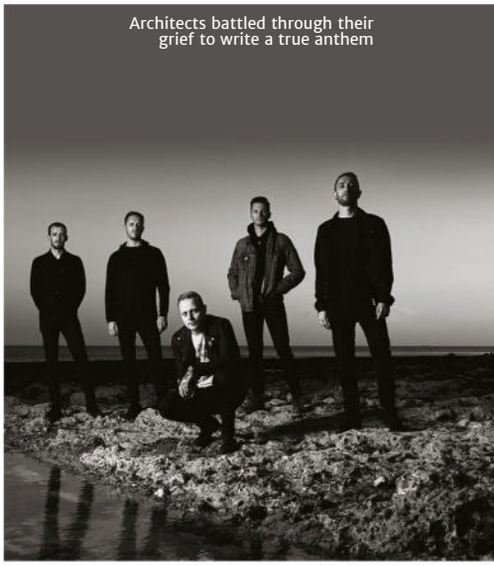
"I wanted to do something new, something to get people to look at Japan and associate it with metal, and that's how I came up with fusing pop with metal that I love," Kobametal told *Metal Hammer* in 2015. He succeeded and then some: Babymetal became their country's first truly international metal sensations, sparking a new wave of interest in the Japanese metal scene that has yet to abate. MA

96 POWER TRIP

Executioner's Tax (Swing Of The Axe)

(NIGHTMARE LOGIC, 2017)

Power Trip were latecomers to the 2000s thrash metal revival, not debuting until 2013. But unlike such jokey recent forebears as Municipal Waste and Evile, they were deadly serious – and never more so than on *Executioner's Tax*, a song that made thrash sound relevant all over again. Here, the Texans eschewed the double-bass drumming and guitar acrobatics often associated with their genre, instead favouring a stomping groove and one hell of a hook: *'Swing of the axe!'* Power Trip became a legitimate force as a result, though their rise was halted by the death of frontman Riley Gale in 2020. The outpouring of grief that followed, as well as tributes from everyone from Ice-T and Randy Blythe to Code Orange and Knocked Loose, showed what an impact they had made in such a short time. MM



Architects battled through their grief to write a true anthem

97 ARCHITECTS

Doomsday

(HOLY HELL, 2018)

After the death of guitarist Tom Searle in 2016, Architects poured every drop of their hurt, anger and confusion into their eighth album, *Holy Hell*. Gut-punching lead single *Doomsday* was the song to take them into their future, and it perfectly captured the sound of a band reeling from their pain, and the unforgiving, cruel nature of grief. By embracing melodic maturity and a newfound production polish alongside the juddering grooves that had characterised their music, *Doomsday* became a template for other bands to follow – notably Wage War, whose song *Low* wore its influence. In a bittersweet twist, it would end up being the track that would transform Architects into arena headliners, playing Wembley Arena in 2019, proving there was life after tragedy. DL

BABYMETAL: MICK HUTSON. ARCHITECTS: PRESS

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Ghost: accidental TikTok superstars

98 GHOST

Mary On A Cross

(SEVEN INCHES OF SATANIC PANIC, 2019)

Ghost were already one of the biggest things in modern metal by the time this cut from their 2019 *Seven Inches Of Satanic Panic* EP went supernova on social media, but *Mary On A Cross*'s unlikely viral success finally brought them to the mainstream audience that band mastermind Tobias Forge had been courting for years. A warm, woozy waltz of a track, its anthemic, earwormy chorus bewitched a whole new demographic of fans, enabling Ghost to be the first clear example of a band from our world to have finally (if somewhat accidentally) broken into TikTok's unique, career-making music ecosystem. Not that anyone is *entirely* sure what the song is actually about. "There are multiple layers in the lyrics that it might be important for people to understand," offered Tobias cryptically. Awesome, so that solves that, then. MA

99 SPIRITBOX

Holy Roller

(ETERNAL BLUE, 2021)

Spiritbox were already firmly established as Ones To Watch by the time *Holy Roller*, the first single from *Eternal Blue*, exploded like a hand grenade in the summer of 2020. Once those first, colossal riffs rang out, however, it was clear that the Canadian troupe hadn't just levelled up considerably – they had successfully repositioned themselves as one of the most exciting and vital bands of their generation. Backed by a memorable video inspired by Ari Aster's disturbing *Midsommar* movie, *Holy Roller* was the perfect crystallisation of the last decade-plus of evolution in metal, packing djent, metalcore, nu metal and more into a massively crushing (but seriously catchy!) three minutes. "This song was never intended to be a single," explained vocalist Courtney LaPlante later. "Our mission statement was, 'Let's make the most ridiculous song that we can.'" MA

Spiritbox: on a roll

GHOST: PRESS. SPIRITBOX: PRESS/LINDSEY BYRNES

Sleep Token's Vessel maintains his ssssilence

100 SLEEP TOKEN

The Summoning

(TAKE ME BACK TO EDEN, 2023)

The meteoric rise of Sleep Token caught us all by surprise. At the start of 2023, the mysterious masked band were one of the metal underground's buzziest names. Led by enigmatic vocalist Vessel, they were a band to watch, for sure, but firmly attracted the niche passion of a cult following.

Then came the song that would change everything. On consecutive days in early January, the band released two singles from their third album, *Take Me Back To Eden*: the burning, crashing *Chokehold*, followed by *The Summoning* – and it was the latter track that would turn them into an Earth-conquering, expectation-shattering phenomenon.

Veering between depraved tech metal, soulful vocals and shimmering electronics, an enormous, hymnal chorus gave way to an Earth-shifting breakdown and screams. Intricate and groove-heavy, *The Summoning* was more like three songs seamlessly crafted into one genre-fluid modern masterpiece. And it still had its trump card to play: a bendy, thirst-trap, funk outro that went viral on TikTok, turning the internet into a lusty puddle. Suddenly, Sleep Token were the most talked-about band on the planet.

"THERE ARE HINTS OF EARLY SLIPKNOT THERE"

COREY TAYLOR

ANDY FORD

"It took me three listens of [*The Summoning*] to realise that when they do that whole psychedelic section at the end, that it's actually the same chorus as it was before, only in a completely different way," Evanescence's Amy Lee told *Revolver*. "And I love it even more for that. I thought they just went a whole new direction and wrote a new part, and then I was like, 'Wait, that's the same… but not at all'."

Sleep Token weren't the most obvious choice for a commercial breakthrough. The success of *The Summoning*, an unconventional, seven-minute, brutal shapeshifter, bucks just about every music industry trend there is.

"It's going to a lot of different places, and I think there isn't any other band out there right now that's able to do that," Judas Priest frontman Rob Halford said earlier this year.

The Summoning set a chain reaction in motion that was unprecedented in modern metal. In just a few weeks, the band saw their Spotify figures jump from the thousands into the millions. To date, the track has been streamed more than 123 million times on Spotify and 19 million on YouTube. On release, *Take Me Back To Eden* went straight in at No.3 in the UK and was the most streamed metal album of 2023. When the band announced a show at Wembley Arena, tickets sold out in 10 minutes. Earlier this year, they left the metal-heavy roster of Spinefarm Records for RCA, the home of mainstream megastars Justin Timberlake and rapper Doja Cat.

"In heavy music, or even in just rock, even in the last decade or 15 years, there's so few stories of bands ever breaking through," says Health bassist and producer, John Famiglietti, who supported the band at Wembley and sees Sleep Token's success as proof metal still can resonate on a massive scale. "This is one of the few times I've seen a band go from a fucking club to an arena in six months. And I don't know the last time that happened."

It's worth pointing out that in the social media era where celebrities and artists are more accessible than ever, Sleep Token have achieved all of this on their own terms. To date they've barely done any press, while their masked mystique is all part of the allure. Last year, fans reacted with outrage when bassist III's identity and birth certificate were allegedly leaked online, seemingly leading to a decision to wipe the band's Instagram.

"There are hints of early Slipknot there," 'Knot vocalist Corey Taylor told *The Allison Hagendorf Show* in 2023, thinking back to the early internet days before Slipknot removed their masks. "At first, we were like, 'Nope. You get nothing. This is what you get, you figure it out. We'll let the music speak for ourselves.'"

Today, Sleep Token are being mentioned in the same breath as potential future Download headliners Ghost, Gojira and Architects. The only difference? Sleep Token have managed to ascend to the same level as those bands in a fraction of the time. Metal needs new superstars who will push things forward, innovate and keep the scene relevant – and with Sleep Token we have a band we can believe in. DL

THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

CHRIS HARMS

The Lord Of The Lost leader has technically died three times, but that hasn't stopped him taking on Eurovision, flying the flag for the LGBTQ+ community and promoting butt plugs

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: JAN SEASON

PRESS/JAN SEASON

Chris Harms has a confession: he's never road-tested one of his band's butt plugs.

"It's not really my thing," says the Lord Of The Lost frontman of the German group's most striking line of merchandise, cunningly sold on their website as 'paperweights'. "As the singer in a rock band, people might expect me to be crossing sexual boundaries, being into hardcore BDSM stuff. But I'm pretty boring. I don't need to feel pain to enjoy sex. But we do have a bet that one of us has to test the quality of the paperweight. So I don't know, maybe I'll lose the bet."

Personal experience or not, butt plugs are *very* Lord Of The Lost. Over the past 15 years, they've gone from being a moody, black-clad, industrial-goth metal band into a life-affirming, glam-tinged, explosion-in-a-latex-factory powerhouse. Their appearance at Eurovision 2023 was a distillation of what they were about – unifying, life-affirming, inclusive.

Chris is talking to *Hammer* today via Zoom from the band's HQ in St Pauli, the charmingly seedy red light district of their hometown of Hamburg. He's wearing a black hoodie with the skull-and-crossbones logo of local football team St Pauli rendered in LGBTQ+-friendly rainbow colours.

LOTL's new album, *LIVE At W:O:A*, is due out in August. It was recorded at 2023's Wacken Open Air, when they closed the show following Iron Maiden's set, as is traditional at a European festival.

"They were the headliners, we were the 'deadliners'," he says drily.

Maiden have become unofficial patrons of Lord Of The Lost, after Steve Harris personally invited Chris's band to open for them on two separate tours.

"Maiden are a model for how bands should conduct themselves – they know themselves and they know their audience perfectly," says Chris, as he prepares to look back at the epic highs and traumatic personal lows that have brought him to this point.

"A GRENADE EXPLODED. I SPENT WEEKS IN THE HOSPITAL"

What was your childhood like?
"I had a very happy childhood. My parents weren't professional musicians, but they played guitar – Beatles songs, things like that. I wasn't a rebellious kid. The rebellion came later."

What was your first instrument?
"When I was two years old, I sat on my mother's lap at some kind of Christmas concert, watching a classical string quartet, and I became fascinated by the cello. I nagged them for one for years, and when I was five they let me start playing the cello. I got a scholarship to study cello when I was 16 – I was this 16-year-old prodigy among all these 25-year-old students. I just wanted to go back to school and be with my friends. So that's what I did after two months. Unless you are some solo superstar, which is very rare, being a classical musician is not creative, it's reproductive. You end up being a cover musician."

Who was the band that made you want to be a musician?
"Roxette. I was 11 years old and the *Joyride* album had just come out. This girl in my class, Melanie, gave me the vinyl: 'You might like it.' I put it on and I was fascinated – I don't know why or by what. They were the first band I ever saw live, on October 24, 1994. I even have the date tattooed on my hand. I started wearing nail polish and eyeliner at school because of Roxette. I didn't know about The Cure or Marilyn Manson or Depeche Mode. I wasn't being rebellious, I just liked it. My mother was like, 'Yeah, why not?' She was a model in the 60s and 70s. She got it."

When did rock and metal come into it?
"It started with Nirvana, Guns N' Roses and German bands like H-Blockx. Then I heard Rammstein on the radio and saw Marilyn Manson at the 1998 MTV Awards, which was darker. My mother realised I liked these kinds of things. She would buy me CDs just because of the cover. One of them was *Midian* by Cradle Of Filth. She saw it and thought, 'My son might like this.'"

What was your first time onstage with a band?
"The first time with a real band was in 1999. The band was called Philiae. I was 19 years old. I don't have good memories of it. I wanted to wear colourful contact lenses, but I'd cleaned them with some alcohol solution, which affected my eyes. I didn't need the contacts because my eyes were red anyway. I couldn't even see the fretboard of my guitar. It was awful, but I still loved it."

You started working in a gay club in Hamburg around the same time. How did that come about?
"It was a club called Absolut in St Pauli. I was working as a barkeeper when I was 18, 19, just to make money, and a friend was like, 'Hey, there's a job open at this bar, you can be however you want.' I had many homosexual friends already, and I felt more like a part of them than I did with my non-gay male friends, even though I wasn't gay myself. At the club, I could work topless, make-up, blue hair, no eyebrows – I looked more colourful than many of the gay men working there. Funny thing is, I got fired from that club for not being gay – this lesbian woman who ran the club saw my girlfriend at the time picking me up from work late at night and fired me. I learned that day that tolerance was not a one-way street."

Did you get into any trouble outside of the club because of the way you looked?
"Nowadays, I like to be undercover on the street – sweatpants, hoodie. I keep the stage persona onstage. But back then, the street was my stage. I didn't miss out on any chance to be seen or provoke. But young people do that – they want to be seen. I got into trouble because of it. I lived in St Pauli, it's a red light district, but not everyone is open-minded. When you're a man with make-up and colourful hair, you end up having problems, getting beaten up, having to run away. That all happened."

You started Lord Of The Lost back in 2007 as a solo project. You've talked about going through 'hard times' before that. What happened?
"There's a pre-story to that. In May 2000, I was in a club in Hamburg. There was a war going on between two different gangs, and one of them threw a live hand grenade into the club. The grenade exploded. It wasn't a shrapnel grenade, which is designed to cut off parts of your body. It had 2,500 little 2mm lead balls inside it, which are made to fly through your muscles and paralyse you. It went off and 20 people got hurt. I was one of them. I spent weeks in the hospital, I had surgeries. I still have over 70 of these little balls in my body, because if you take them out, you destroy the muscles."

That sounds horrific.
"It killed me mentally. I had serious post-traumatic stress syndrome. This is where my rebellious time started. I started on a one-and-half year drug career. I was taking everything apart from crack and heroin, just to get my mind off it, just to be myself again. I died three times from drugs. Overdoses. I had to be resuscitated."

What was your wake-up call?
"The end of it was on New Year's Eve 2001. I took an overdose of liquid MDMA. I woke up in the hospital and this old doctor was there. He told me, 'I've seen kids like you, and I'm not judging

Chris has faced abuse and violence for his appearance, but has no intention of letting the bullies win

PRESS/JAN SEASON

Lord Of The Lost: Chris's "democratic dictatorship"

"WE GREW A THICK SKIN THROUGH EUROVISION"

you, I just want to tell you one thing – in one year you'll be clean or dead. You can decide today.' That's when I made the decision to get clean. I haven't taken drugs since then."

Do you still suffer from PTSD?
"I have flashbacks sometimes. If there are fireworks, say on New Year's Eve, very loud explosions, sometimes you'll see me under the table. But mostly it's fine. Those are just short moments."

How did all that shape Lord Of The Lost?
"I had to walk away from the dark side of music for a while. I founded this glam rock band called The Pleasures. I had to do something sparkly and colourful for a couple of years. But because of my nature, I always gravitate towards melancholic and dark things. Darkness for me is something beautiful, it's not something negative. I started writing songs for Lord Of The Lost in 2007. Then, after two years of writing and starting to record the first album with just me, I realised I needed some friends to go onstage with. So that's when Lord Of The Lost became a band."

What did you want out of Lord Of The Lost at the beginning?
"I just wanted to make music. I've never made any decisions in my life to be a celebrity or be famous. Every decision I make has been based on passion. But in 2007, I met someone and fell in love with her. Falling in love can be so extreme – there's the happiness, but there are also the fears. 'OK, what's going to happen now? Am I going to lose this person in the future?' That's why the first Lord Of The Lost album, which I started writing and recording around that time, is called *Fears*."

Did people like the band early on, or did you get haters from the start?
"The hate came later. At the very beginning, no one knows about you. But I learned quickly that when you grow, you gain one fan and three haters. Especially if you polarise people because you look a certain way or sound a certain way."

Do the haters bother you?
"We grew a thick skin, especially through Eurovision. There are times when it gets personal, or people say something that is just not true: 'They didn't earn their success, they had a millionaire pumping money into them.' You're like, 'Bro, what the fuck?' There are moments that get me, but 99% of the comments just wash over me. We wrote a song called *Leave Your Hate In The Comments* [for the album *Blood & Glitter*]. Most haters have a lonely and sad life. The comment field is their stage. So we gave them that stage. It's their only chance to shine."

What has been the biggest setback along the way?
"There haven't been major setbacks, but it hasn't been a smooth ride. There have been times when we've slept in the van in the cold or on fans' couches because we had no money for hotels. Of the 15 years that the band have been going, we didn't earn anything for the first 10. But we never showed people that – we made it look like were growing and doing things for ourselves. It was 10 years of hard work."

Lord Of The Lost is your band. That's fair to say, right?
"Yes, but we are a band. It's not a solo project with hired guns. We run this company together, we split everything, I ask for everyone's opinion, I always look out for everyone being happy, but we don't make decisions democratically. We call it a democratic dictatorship. We try to decide things together, and not everything is always my vision – if someone comes in with a brilliant idea for a song or a music video, I don't want to water ▶

PRESS/JAN SEASON

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Even though Lord Of The Lost finished last at Eurovision, Chris has no regrets

"I'VE WRITTEN PARTY SCHLAGER MUSIC WITH DIRTY WORD-PLAY"

it down. But if we're not following one vision, I have the last word. If you make too many compromises in art, you end up being mediocre."

Are you ambitious?
"I'm super-ambitious. I've sacrificed a lot of myself for the band. Personal joy, hobbies, time for myself, all these kinds of things. But I like to work hard. Although I could live from Lord Of The Lost alone, I'm still in the studio producing other bands, writing for other bands, every day. I won't stop doing that, no matter how rich I might get from my own thing."

Is it true that you've got a sideline anonymously writing music for other artists?
"It is. There's over 1,000 songs from the last 20 years that I've written for other people in all kinds of genres, including party schlager music. That's basically folk music with techno beats that's really popular in Germany. I don't like it at all, but there's this low-level humour to it which I do love – dirty word-plays, lyrics about partying and drugs and alcohol and girls. When I have these ideas, I laugh about them so hard – I can have fun creating this music, but I don't need to listen to it. But I do this anonymously, not because I'm ashamed of it, but I don't want people to Google these songs and think I'm the artist that sings it. I write under many different names."

You don't drink alcohol. Why not?
"I was never a big drinker. Even at an early age, partying was not my thing. But after my short drug career, I didn't drink or smoke or do drugs for seven years to clean my body. After that, I started occasionally drinking and smoking. I was doing it on tour because other people were doing it. It was a social thing. But I never really liked it, and I'd lose so many hours the next day sobering up. So in 2018, I took a pen and paper and worked out exactly how many hours I lost drinking and sobering up, and dedicated that time to working out and doing sports. I can be with drunk people, that's no problem. For a short amount of time. Past 2am, it just doesn't work. But nothing good ever happens after then anyway."

With the benefit of hindsight, was Eurovision worth it?
"It was. It feels unreal. It was a rush of three months of my life. We did 900 interviews, then two weeks in Liverpool, it was fucking crazy. Even coming last, there was nothing to be ashamed of. We were an established band. We didn't come from nothing beforehand, we didn't go back to nothing afterwards. Even if we knew we were going to come last, we would do it again."

You posed with an LGBTQ+ rainbow flag on Tik Tok, which caused a storm with the right wing media in Germany. What was it like being in the middle of that?
"The BBC wanted us to wave a German flag. We said, 'We don't feel comfortable with that, there's so much bullshit going on with right wing parties in our country.' We do not get national pride – we're thankful to be born in a country like this, but we were born here by accident. We were like, 'We can wave a rainbow flag, it makes sense.' Then during the flag parade, when we came onstage at the start of the show, we didn't wave a flag. The whole stage was black, red and gold – the colours of the German flag, we didn't need to wave anything. But the right wing bubble were going: 'You're traitors to your fatherland, how can you do that?' Politicians were saying, 'Do you really want these 'pink men' to represent the normal German citizen?' So we replied, 'If you think *you* are a German citizen, we don't want to represent you.'"

Does prodding the right wing worry you?
"Yeah, sometimes. But I'm more worried about not doing it. I feel like as an artist, it's your responsibility to say something. There are certain things where you have to intervene."

When you started the band, did you always plan to become this unifying force?
"No. That was never part of the plan. Yes, so many people come to us and thank us for giving them hope and strength, so many transgender people who feel like there's a metal band for them. But that's crazy – you don't think you're going to end up somewhere between a motivational trainer and a politician. But I'm happy to be whatever people want me to be."

Have you put an expiry date on Lord Of The Lost? Can you still imagine going onstage in a latex catsuit in your 60s?
"I don't see myself in a catsuit, but I can definitely see myself doing this in my 60s. Look at Iron Maiden – they still do their thing and it doesn't seem silly what they do. I can see myself in some other cool stuff, looking fine with the age I will be. But then if you feel comfortable inside, maybe you could still pull off a latex catsuit when you're 70."

Are you still handy on the cello? If it all goes wrong with Lord Of The Lost, is that still a career option?
"I still play. We did a Lord Of The Lost show in November where I played the cello with an 80-piece classical orchestra, and sang at the same time. So I could do it. Just not solo."

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PRESS/CORINNE CUMMING

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: UNCLE ALLAN

Apocalyptica: lightning strikes again for Finland's daredevil trio

PRESS

APOCALYPTICA

Plays Metallica Vol. 2

THROWDOWN ENTERTAINMENT

Finland's classical metallers return to their source

APOCALYPTICA HAD TO be talked into recording their debut album, *Plays Metallica By Four Cellos*. Having formed the band for a bit of fun, they didn't really think anyone would want to hear four classically trained metalheads recreate their favourite band's music beyond the odd club show. As it turned out, they would go on to sell six million albums, tour the world, write their own songs and have rock and metal luminaries from Dave Lombardo and Corey Taylor to Cristina Scabbia and Ville Valo lining up to guest on tracks.

Now, though, it all comes full circle. It's strange to think that the first *Plays Metallica...* was released in June 1996, just days after Metallica themselves released *Load*. It's an epoch away and, consequently, *Plays Metallica Vol. 2* is a very different beast to its predecessor. The first album was packed with hits and iconic tracks from Metallica's 'classic' era. They were the obvious choices at the time perhaps, but transposing monsters like *Enter Sandman* and *Master Of Puppets* to cello was certainly not an obvious or even a very sensible thing to do. This was, after all, still three years before Metallica teamed up with the San Francisco Symphony for *S&M* – and who knows how much influence Apocalyptica's success had on *that* little diversion?

This time out Apocalyptica take a deeper dive into Metallica's back catalogue, particularly the albums released since *...Four Cellos*. They also play a little looser with their versions, reinterpreting the musical message where it makes more sense, rather than offering a literal translation.

So *Ride The Lightning* kicks things off with an eerily extended intro that also brings elements of *For Whom The Bell Tolls* – previously covered on Apocalyptica's second album, *Inquisition Symphony* – into its folds. From there it's straight into the much-maligned *St. Anger*, reworked with brighter melodies and a less annoying snare sound. *The Unforgiven II* is lighter and airier than the already balladic original, but perfectly suited to the band's classical treatment. *Blackened* retains its thrashing groove, which, it turns out, the cello was always perfectly suited for, but it's the reinterpreted solos and melodic break that really stand out.

The two instrumentals they tackle – *The Call Of Ktulu* and *To Live Is To Die* – are played fairly straight, as they don't have to recreate vocal melody lines alongside the instrumentation. Elsewhere, Metallica bassist Robert Trujillo makes a guest appearance on a frantic version of *The Four Horsemen*, and relative *Black Album* deep cut *Holier Than Thou* is played faster than the original. That leaves an epic version of *One*, with the lyrics delivered by James Hetfield as spoken-word poetry, and a second version ('Two', if you will) delivered as an orchestral instrumental, to finish off the album. Both versions sound incredible, with beautiful melodies and atonal stabs of strings bringing Apocalyptica's own musical vision to anguished life.

APOCALYPTICA HAVE GONE BEYOND MERE NOVELTY VALUE

And that's what this album is about. Apocalyptica have gone beyond mere novelty value to become their own unique entity, breathing fresh life and a new perspective into these songs. It's not something they could have envisaged all those years ago.

FOR FANS OF: Metallica, Nightwish, Van Canto

PAUL TRAVERS

ABRAMS

Blue City

BLUES FUNERAL RECORDINGS

Denver's navigators of unease evolve from their sludge roots

Abrams' fifth album continues their evolution from the post-sludge of 2015 debut *Lust. Love. Loss.* into more uplifting, anthemic heaviness. *Blue City* confronts the insidious unease that comes with staying in your comfort zone as *Tomorrow* starts off with a thunderbolt of a riff, exuberant percussion and vibrant, psychedelic washes. *Etherol*'s giant riffs crash like azure waves, while *Death Om*'s stomping, cyclical groove is an exhilarating wake-up call. *Blue City* effortlessly combines monstrous riff dissonance with anthemic hooks to create an upswell of positivity in the face of frustration that's sure to shake you from your existential slumber.

FOR FANS OF: Torche, Cave In, Baroness

TOM O'BOYLE

ANOTHER NOW

Hex

SELF-RELEASED

Dutch metalcore quintet fail to perfect their formula

Less a natural evolution from Another Now's 2022 debut album, *Omni*, than a sticking to the formula, *Hex* continues to blend high-pitched, snarling, almost black metal vocals with deeper growls. This rapid interchange can often feel jarring rather than dynamic, and the muddied bass struggles to cut through the chaos at times. *Smile!* is one of the album's strongest tracks, with its tuneful choruses and sweeping guitar riffs demanding attention. The more melodic approach and inclusion of electronic elements are where Another Now shine brightest, punctuating an otherwise unremarkable album with moments of promise and potential.

FOR FANS OF: Northlane, Electric Callboy, Crossfaith

CHERI FAULKNER

ARHAT

Secrets Of Ancient Gods

SELF-RELEASED

Ukrainian groove metallers get an Egyptian infusion

As well as providing a fertile delta that benefited the growth of many ancient civilisations, Ancient Egypt has afforded bountiful metallic inspiration for everyone from Iron Maiden to Nile. Using it as a launch-pad into the world of deities and millennia-old tales, Ukraine's Arhat add symphonic and traditional instruments to conjure the arcane imagery that fits the subject matter. *Path Eternal*'s eerie, flute-led meditations and *Shlyah Do Prozrinnya* are the most opulent demonstrations of this collision of cultures, while *Abyss Of Flame* and *Arcana XVI* show the quartet can also deliver crunching hooks atop to their frenzied death/groove assault. Arhat display abundant amounts of confidence on their second album, the vocals and the guitars especially proving even more diverse and adventurous this time around.

FOR FANS OF: Fleshgod Apocalypse, Devildriver, Kataklysm

ADAM BRENNAN

Rotting Christ have gone all in on the grandeur

ROTTING CHRIST

PRO XRISTOU

SEASON OF MIST

A new wave of singalong, Hellenic blasphemy

PARAGONS OF RELIABILITY, Rotting Christ are widely acknowledged to be one of those rare bands that never release bad records. Rather than engaging in nervous speculation, long-time fans can simply sit back and wait for the band's next imperious statement, safe in the knowledge that everything Rotting Christ do, they do with distinction.

Impressively, they remain eminently capable of surprises. Deep into their fourth decade, Sakis Tolis and his comrades seem to have made the most overtly accessible album of their careers. *Pro Xristou* is still resolutely dark as fuck, of course, but listeners could find themselves humming these tunes, even as humanity circles the plughole.

There have been many significant milestones in Rotting Christ's recorded history to date. Few fans of underground metal would question the seminal impact of 1993 debut, *Thy Mighty Contract*, or the way 2007's critically lauded *Theogonia* seemed to freshly define Rotting Christ's portentous cacophony. Somehow, *Pro Xristou* feels equally important to those records, if not more so. A perfectly timed entry point into their vast legacy, the band's 14th full-length deserves to be one that introduces them to a much bigger audience. Put simply, these songs are so good that even a band called Rotting Christ should be able to capitalise.

The focused flipside to the frantic intensity of 2019's *The Heretics*, *Pro Xristou* is almost entirely delivered at a regal mid-pace. Rotting Christ's sound has always hinged upon grandeur and dark melody, but these songs have been given extra space to breathe, and the clear and concise results are glorious.

After a typically bombastic overture, *The Apostate* establishes this new and more emotionally potent formula, wherein absurdly memorable hooks are woven seamlessly into a haughty barrage of guitars, and every fist in the room suddenly finds itself heading skywards. *Like Father, Like Son* repeats the trick, with a graceful, Bathory-like gait, riffs that defer to the old school and sublime guitar motifs that spiral upwards like an infernal Iron Maiden on a mission to the moon.

A bitter yarn about some ill-defined God's creation of man, *The Sixth Day* leans heavily into 90s gothic metal, with echoes of The Cult and Paradise Lost adding to a sense of crestfallen nostalgia. In contrast, *La Lettera Del Diavolo* sneaks blastbeats under the stylistic radar, for an exercise in machine-gun storytelling that unexpectedly blossoms into another sumptuously melodic refrain. Most enjoyably, *The Farewell* is built upon a riff that shares roots with Manowar's *Gloves Of Metal*, and has an overall tang of 80s hard rock bravado.

The notion that this would all sound phenomenal billowing into the air in an arena is hard to resist. Most pleasing of all, Rotting Christ have not had to compromise one jot to make *Pro Xristou*. Songs like *Pretty World, Pretty Dies* and *Saoirse* are derived from the same well of inspiration that led to cherished anti-hymns like *The Sign Of Evil Existence* and *Non Serviam*. The difference here is that Rotting Christ have realised what a truly great heavy metal band they are, and that everybody loves a good tune. It suits them insanely well.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, Septicflesh, Hinayana

DOM LAWSON

PRESS

BAT
Under The Crooked Claw
NUCLEAR BLAST

Municipal Waste guitarists serve up another dirty dose of speed

When they're not blasting out boozy thrash with Municipal Waste, you'll find guitarists Ryan Waste and Nick Poulos ripping through raucous blackened speed metal bangers with Bat. The trio's love of Motörhead continues to shine through on sleazy rockers like *Just Buried*, and while all the expected Venom and Celtic Frost reference points are here in abundance, there's a heightened punk flavour on this second album too, with songs like *Rite For Exorcism* echoing the determined grooves of Poison Idea's *Alan's On Fire*. There's not a dull moment on *Under The Crooked Claw*, and while it won't be the most original record you'll hear this year, it's easily the band's most focused and potent yet. Emphatic proof that Bat aren't just a mere side-project, but a snarling, fully fledged heavy metal monster in their own right.

FOR FANS OF: Midnight, Speedwolf, Slaughter

KEZ WHELAN

BEATEN TO DEATH
Sunrise Over Rigor Mortis
MAS-KINA RECORDINGS

Oslo's grindcore outcasts lob more paintbombs at the clubhouse

It's easy to wonder, as much as it's totally obvious, why Beaten To Death have been granted the short end of the grindcore stick despite having released six 'True Norwegian Melodic Grindcore' masterworks. Their releases are littered with non-distorted guitars playing indie, noise rock and prog melodies backed by a sardonic humour, fronted by cat-covered merch wrapped in brightly coloured surrealist album art. All of which is just the beginning of their anti-grind laundry list. *Sunrise Over Rigor Mortis* keeps alive the spirit of BTD, redefining grindcore by being almost entirely un-grindcore, with baritone choir vocals on *Dying The Dream*, and wobbly psych rock on *Mosh For Mika (Waddle Wadle)*. The hilariously painful, self-referencing *My Hair Will Be Long Until Death* and the triumphant major-key anthem *We're Not Gonna Make It* should spark thousands-strong singalongs, because it all makes perfect sense. Even if it shouldn't.

FOR FANS OF: Fuck The Facts, Discordance Axis, Gridlink

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

BLACKGOLD
Back With Another One
SELF-RELEASED

London's nu metal upstarts bring the party and the bravado

The metal scene is awash right now with bands putting their own stamp on nu metal, but few have captured the groove-heavy swagger of what it was truly like the first time around. On each of their three EPs, masked trio Blackgold have done just that – their brash sound is pure 90s hedonism, aimed squarely at causing mayhem in the pits. On *One Chance*, which recalls Limp Bizkit so strongly in style and sound, right down to turntable scratching and rapper Spookz spitting out: *'People talkin' shit about me?'*, you could be listening to a *Significant Other* offcut. There are messages behind the music. *Social Blackout* questions the toxicity of social media (*'Fake news, fake views, fake me, fake you'*), but really, *Back With Another One*, is all about the unstoppable party energy.

FOR FANS OF: Limp Bizkit, Skindred, Korn

DANNII LEIVERS

CANDY
It's Inside You
RELAPSE

Forward-thinking fury from the hardcore/industrial metal border

If there's a genre that presumably has the key to the secrets of time machine technology, it's hardcore. Many of the sounds and the imagery, ethos, stage presence and sartorial sense haven't changed much since the 80s. But, historically, it's produced and nurtured pockets of vanguards who've dared to rock the boat. Candy have slotted themselves alongside outfits like Harm's Way and Show Me The Body, who are unafraid to incorporate the metallic and industrial/electronic parts of their record collections into the mix. On *It's Inside You*, 80s drum machine sonics collide with thrash metal precision and thunderous metalcore chugging to create *eXistenZ*, *Dehumanize Me* and the title track. They're all tunes designed to open up any dancefloor, while *Love Like Snow* experiments with wispy and haunting 4AD Records melodies and vocals, before the album's final third pays modern homage to CBGB Sunday afternoon matinee gigs.

FOR FANS OF: Pitchshifter, Integrity, Nails

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

Arka'n Asrafokor have become spiritual guardians for their Togo homeland

ARKA'N ASRAFOKOR
Dzikkuh
REIGNING PHOENIX MUSIC

Togo's metal/Afrobeat fusionists unleash an exhilarating call to arms

HAILING FROM WEST

Africa's Togo, Arka'n Asrafokor are becoming figureheads for a diverse African metal scene. In the four years since they released their promising debut album, *Zã Keli*, the band changed their name from Arka'n (Asrafokor means 'music of warriors') and beefed up their sound. Whereas *Zã Keli* contained frequent detours into traditional folk and soulful Afro-funk, *Dzikkuh* is a more ambitious blend of groove metal, death metal and nu metal elements, with frenzied Afrobeat polyrhythms from percussionist Mass Aholou, and hypnotic chants.

Opening with slashed guitars and skittering drums, *The Truth* is one of the most exhilarating tracks released so far this year. While Arka'n Asrafokor switch seamlessly between French, English and the Togolese language, Ewe, their choruses tend to be sung in the latter. As such, their music is imbued with emotional and spiritual meaning – a call to arms entwined with the land. Those continuously shifting dynamics ensure *Dzikkuh* is a compelling experience: in a hailstorm of military-grade drums, *Not Getting In Line* channels Sepultura, and *Mamade* starts out like a deceptively grungy, African take on Alice In Chains' *Jar Of Flies*, before a hypnotic chant gives way to a six-foot-deep groove and a blistering solo.

The band have talked about their symbiotic connection with nature; *Walk With US* and *Angry God Of Earth* vent their frustrations at mankind's persistent destruction of the environment. Meanwhile, *Asrafo* ('Warrior') tackles the simmering anger that still resides in Africa following violent colonial abuse. Over the sound of knives being sharpened, clean vocalist and guitarist Rock Ahavi invokes a bloodied landscape: *'Now we know the names of the real enemies. They pretend to rule the world... leading it to destruction and desolation.' Dzikkuh* is a record that will remain in your thoughts long after it stops spinning.

FOR FANS OF: Alien Weaponry, Sepultura, Lamb Of God

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

Julie Christmas re-enters the realms of the uncanny

JULIE CHRISTMAS

Ridiculous And Full Of Blood

RED CRK

Mercurial thrills and mayhem from Brooklyn's vocalist extraordinaire

LIKE ONE OF those odd, otherworldly flowers that buds so rarely it makes the news when the petals finally begin to uncurl, Julie Christmas returns with a startling new solo album. She might have made her name fronting a clutch of difficult, dangerous-sounding albums for Made Out Of Babies and Battle Of Mice in the mid-00s, but it's her later work that has demonstrated the true breadth of her talent: 2010 solo album *The Bad Wife* and 2016's scintillating Cult Of Luna collaboration, *Mariner*.

Even for an artist whose music defies easy categorisation, *Ridiculous And Full Of Blood* darts down numerous unexpected paths. Versatile, nuanced and multi-faceted, it feels like a logical successor to *The Bad Wife*, despite its wholesale uncanniness. The baroque overtones and jaunty accordion have been replaced with expansive sweeps, plush post-rock and fizzling avant-pop, all of which cohere into a rich, rounded release that is simultaneously approachable and obtuse.

Julie's coos, croons and querulous catcalls are interspersed with the occasional bloodcurdling shriek, all deployed in line with some deep, idiosyncratic design that speaks to all the life that's been lived since she last entered the recording studio. Tracks like *The Ash* – forged of huge, prismatic riffs while Julie sounds like she's trying to wrestle with lightning – and the aptly titled *End Of The World*, assisted by a brilliantly craggy-sounding Johannes Persson, on loan from Cult Of Luna, offer satisfying heft, but there's no shortage of intrigue to be found within the album's lighter-touch moments. *Supernatural* provides soaring pop, while the playfully squelchy *Kids* suggests Four Tet's Kieran Hebden losing himself in a bumper-sized bucket of Haribo. Whether it's scuttling, crunching, or throwing off showers of incandescent sparks, though, there's a giddy, genreless joy to it all, ensuring *Ridiculous And Full Of Blood* upends every expectation you might have, while delivering one spine-tingling thrill after another.

FOR FANS OF: Spotlights, Björk, Big I Brave

ALEX DELLER

COBRA THE IMPALER

Karma Collision

LISTENABLE

Ex-Aborted axeman rampages across the metal landscape

Captained by former Aborted shredder Thijs De Cloedt, and born from an ambition to open pits and minds, these rising metal magpies are in scintillating form on their second album. Serving as both a criticism of modern society and a call to arms to those who want change, the quintet draw on thrash, stoner, grunge, metalcore and the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal over 10 muscular and melodic tracks. Frontman Manuel Remmerie is their MVP. Sounding like the offspring of Testament's Chuck Billy and Alice In Chains' Jerry Cantrell, his performances on the crushing *Magnetic Hex*, the seriously catchy *Season Of The Savage* and the Tool-tinged title track are full of power and charisma. Intense, exciting and crammed with killer choruses, Cobra The Impaler's latest is a venomous affair.

FOR FANS OF: Testament, Killswitch Engage, Aborted

EDWIN McFEE

DEFECTS

Modern Error

MASCOT

UK metalcore hopefuls combine the personal and the predictable

Modern Error is a fitting title for Defects' debut album. While it's a sturdy, guttural blast reflecting on the pains of modern life, it also suffers from the flaws of much modern metal. Crashing in on a high with *Scapegoat*, it's clear that Defects know how to craft a captivating, impactful metalcore tune that contrasts old-school grit with a more emotional, softer touch. But, as the album progresses, their formula becomes increasingly predictable. *Modern Error* follows that rinse-and-repeat cycle: a bruising verse, followed by the squeaky-clean 'please-please singalong' chorus, and a snap back to guttural torment. While it's a commendable debut with a slew of individually strong tracks – *Dream Awake* has a killer guitar solo, *Echo Chamber* is a lovely, melodic reflection on trauma and personal strength and *Second To None* packs a blegh-centric punch – Defects haven't added to the metalcore template.

FOR FANS OF: Parkway Drive, Volumes, Wage War

EMILY SWINGLE

DOPETHRONE

Broke Sabbath

TOTEM CAT

Canadian DIY gang stay evil with seven tracks of sin

It's been six years since Montreal's blackened sludge trio disgusted us with new material, and their sixth album sounds like it's been stewing in filth. Fuzzy, furious and fucking heavy, all their hallmarks are thrust into your face from the off; *Life Kills You* is a punishing diatribe of misery and mirth, while *Shlaghammer* and *Sultans Of Sins* ooze malignancy. Between the gnashing fury of his vocals and the bludgeoning density of his riffs, frontman Vincent Houde is like an animal possessed, while the drums and bass

PRESS/FRED GERVAIS

provide *Broke Sabbath* with a molten steel core, shifting dangerously at every turn. At a shade under 40 minutes, the album doesn't overstay its welcome, but its relentless pounding can feel like a test of endurance, while scattered dialogue samples risk derailing the rhythm. Uncomfortable and unyielding, just like Dopethrone like it.

FOR FANS OF: Weedeater, Electric Wizard, Bongzilla

JACK TERRY

ERNTE
Weltenzerstörer
VENDETTA

Stark, existential black metal from the Swiss hinterlands

Switzerland's Ernte have been pretty prolific since forming during the pandemic, but it obviously isn't merriment that's driving them. This is the kind of black metal for people whose brains interpret the sound of existential torment as raw production and voice-cracking, agonised screeches. The title track in particular goes all in on the slow side, steady drums and relatively bare arrangements aligning with the ominous cover art in evoking images of a medieval apocalypse behind a crackling low-res screen. *Vessels Of Sacrifice* features vocalist Askahex on violin prominently and sounds even more maudlin, her use of it adding so much more that could be capitalised on further. And yet the stark, occasionally featureless despondency is adept at creating the auditory feeling of being slowly immersed in a bath of ice water.

FOR FANS OF: Urfaust, Gehenna, Totalselfhatred

PERRAN HELYES

EVERGREY
Theories Of Emptiness
NAPALM

More emotionally ruinous prog metal from Swedish dramatists

There is a moment on every Evergrey album when diehard fans start feeling they have to have a lie down. On their 14th, it's *Cold Dreams*. Even by their sky-high standards, it's a breathlessly dramatic thing that dares to tinker with a winning formula. At this point, Tom S. Englund could sing about the price of surströmming over some giant riffs and hearts would melt, but *Theories...* is full of signs that Evergrey are refreshing their vision as they march forward. The timely use of synths and other electronics is more prominent than before as *Falling From The Sun* and *Misfortune* sparkle with futuristic charm. And yet the abrasive swell of guitars that drives *One Heart* is as raw and punishing as Evergrey have ever sounded. Classy, as always.

FOR FANS OF: Amorphis, Manticora, Oceans Of Slumber

DOM LAWSON

FOUR STROKE BARON
Data Diamond
PROSTHETIC

Nevada duo's Frankenstein's monster experiment goes awry

Starting life as two separate EPs, one 'heavy', the other 'purely electronic', Four Stroke Baron's fourth album takes a cut-and-paste approach to stitching both together. The best attempts at hybridisation enhance each element to create something greater than the sum of its parts – which *Data Diamond* largely fails to do. No amount of wacky FX or synthesised vocals can disguise the lifeless riffs meant to drive the likes of *The Witch* and *1000 Threads*. Only the seven-minute title track shows any sense of composition or craft but, by then, you're left wondering if AI could have done a better job.

FOR FANS OF: Igorrr, Moby, Sikth

REMFRY DEDMAN

GURT
Satan Etc
WHEN PLANETS COLLIDE

London sludge crew bring a brawl to their party vibes

Gurt's self-described 'party doom' makes sludge metal a bit frivolous. The album title suggests an ironic detachment that won't be for everybody, but it's still more slaughterhouse than it is comedy club. This time they've gone in a more compact and punkish aggressive direction, creating something of a more inhuman, garbled Cancer Bats effect, driven by howling shrieks on rollicking, borderline drunken riffs. *The Most Dying Way To Die* and the admirably up-to-the-minute reference of *Sandworm Fleshlight* are amusing on the surface but essentially ugly pieces of work. The mix is maxed out and cacophonous, leaving little room for dynamics and making the longer tracks a bit overbearing, but the grooves in *Appetite For Construction* are punchy and certainly make a whole lotta noise.

FOR FANS OF: Slabdragger, Cancer Bats, Bongzilla

PERRAN HELYES

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

DVRK
Infinite Resistance
SEASON OF MIST

The debut EP from this quintet is a bruising, if sometimes rather one-dimensional, barrage of nu metal-infused deathcore, underpinned by electronic and techno elements. It's enjoyable, but doesn't live long in the memory.

ELLIOT LEAVER

THE FIRES BELOW
Thorns
SELF-RELEASED

Stoner riffs meet sludgy grooves on the second EP by this London four-piece. The Fires Below's overall sound is a melting pot of Down, Mastodon and High On Fire, all finished off with a dash of Orange Goblin for good measure.

ELLIOT LEAVER

GREYWAVE
Dancing In The Dust
CHURCH ROAD

This Birmingham-based trio have shown promise ever since the release of their debut EP in 2021. Their songwriting chops continue to advance on this third EP, an otherworldly and powerful hybrid of shoegaze and grunge.

REMFRY DEDMAN

OMSORG
Echoes
PUFFIN ARTLAB

Emotionally wounded, careering, clattering and visceral post-hardcore from the Danish collective. If you can imagine the torturous weight of Breach mixed with the vulnerable punk rock of Touché Amoré, then you're close.

STEPHEN HILL

SYL
Afmagt
AUDIBLE

Much more unhinged, angular and aggressive than their 2022 debut *Alt Godt*, Danish punks SYL's jagged, noisy post-hardcore sounds alternately melodic and barbaric on this brief but surprisingly varied five-track EP.

KEZ WHELAN

ZERO ONE
Faults In My Design
SELF-RELEASED

Edinburgh-based Zero One's second EP sees the quintet refine an already strong metalcore sound. Aggressive, screamed vocals add a raw tinge to the tight, polished instrumental aspects of their sound.

CHERI FAULKNER

Exodus: thrash's battle-hardened veterans are still going strong

EXODUS

British Disaster: The Battle Of '89 (Live At The Astoria)

NUCLEAR BLAST

California thrash metal stalwarts strike London with all guns blazing

THE YEAR IS 1989. *Look Who's Talking* is one of the highest-grossing films, and New Kids On The Block are never off the fucking radio. Still, it's not all bad. The thrash metal movement is in its rudest health, its momentum yet to be stalled by the new trends of the 1990s.

This was the era when everyone from Metallica to Megadeth and Slayer to Sacred Reich were still rising stars, the reaches for their potential seemingly stratospheric.

Amidst it all, Exodus not only released their now-classic third album, *Fabulous Disaster*, they scored a major MTV hit with *The Toxic Waltz*, and then kept their winning streak going by touring all over Europe and the States.

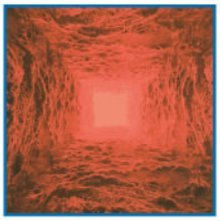
British Disaster: The Battle Of '89 captures the sound of the Richmond, Californians' anarchic ascent, recorded at London's The Astoria on March 8 that year. In marketing materials, guitarist Gary Holt promises that this recording is as raw as can be and completely untouched, and it's easy to believe him. Exodus stay characteristically savage throughout their 15-song set, Gary's hellfire riffs and Steve 'Zetro' Souza's Bon-Scott-on-speed snarls exploding from the amplifiers.

The aggressors' onslaught is far more than mindless noise, though. *A Lesson In Violence* reaffirms itself as Gary's crowning achievement, its latter half dedicated to the band founder's disciplined yet ferocious soloing. Elsewhere, *And Then There Were None* marches to a more tasteful groove, drummer Tom Hunting slowing down alongside hulking chords, whereas the melodic sensibility of the aforementioned *The Toxic Waltz* demonstrates how it became a mainstay.

It's unlikely that anyone who isn't already invested in Exodus will be won over here. However, with the band now almost four decades removed from their debut, diehards can get a glimpse of them at their hungriest and, dare it be said, loudest. *The Battle Of '89* still rages 35 years on.

FOR FANS OF: Overkill, Sacred Reich, Megadeth

MATT MILLS



HAUNTED PLASMA

I

SVART

Extraterrestrial adventures from Tampere's cosmic collective

When members of Oranssi Pazuzu, K-X-P and Grave Pleasures join forces to indulge their deepest, darkest sci-fi fantasies, expect the unexpected. Swooshing into outer space like a pixellated rocket ship in an 80s arcade game, Haunted Plasma explore strange new worlds by way of pulsating synths, swirling kosmische and dancefloor-ready rhythms. Vocals are provided by a range of cult Finnish psych, pop and post-punk artists – including Hexvessel's Mat McNerney – all absorbed into a hive mind, inducing bouts of eerily metronomic headbanging. The greyscale psychedelia of Chrome, the technoid mutations of Teeth Of The Sea and the idea of Joy Division fleeing a doomed moon of Cybertron offer touchstones, but HP are, in reality, a hitherto unknown lifeform entirely.

FOR FANS OF: Teeth Of The Sea, Circle, Oranssi Pazuzu

ALEX DELLER

HIGH DESERT QUEEN

Palm Reader

MAGNETIC EYE

Texan desert rockers tune in to their darker side

There's a distinctly grungy flavour to this quartet's second album that belies their sunny Texan roots. HDQ's riff-driven desert rock may reek of dive bars and gasoline, but the band are becoming masters of elongated, ponderous rock that owes a lot to Alice in Chains. *Palm Reader* ranges from *Time Waster*'s explosive riffs to the hazy psych of *Tuesday Night Blues*, but it's the darker, more intense moments where HDQ are at their most interesting. *Ancient Aliens* hits hard when Ryan Garney trails his bold, reverbed vocals like a desert rock *Them Bones*. The languid intro to *Solar Rain* deviates from desert psych to something more angsty, and the vocal note-holds on *Head Honcho* are engineered to transfix those looking for something more expansive from their desert rock.

FOR FANS OF: Orange Goblin, Fatso Jetson, Kyuss

HOLLY WRIGHT

HUNTSMEN

The Dry Land

PROSTHETIC

Americana-infused doom trekkers get hardened up on the trail

In the four years since *Mandala Of Fear*, Huntsmen's countrified metal has crusted over with scabs, calluses and ridges of scar tissue. While their knack for strummy Americana remains intact, it's the heaviness that has altered, like a jagged black metal sawblade has smoothed the post-doom contours. When they let rip, everything threatens to go up in flames, and while the contrast between beauty and brutality is now starker, the strands have been skilfully woven together. Ironically, *The Dry Land* provides fertile ground – in terms of technical achievement as well as intrigue, ingenuity and visceral satisfaction.

FOR FANS OF: Inter Arma, U.S. Christmas, Wolves In The Throne Room

ALEX DELLER

PRESS

KULK
It Gets Worse
HUMAN WORTH

Oddball British doom duo keep the bad trip brief

Makers of abominable, off-kilter sludge for the last few years, Kulk have picked up the pace. *It Gets Worse* is a wickedly noisy, antisocial record full of bruising bursts of doomed-out desolation, howling feedback and corrupted psych and dub tropes. When the duo's fizzing chemistry is on display, Kulk sound more like a stampeding herd of rhinos than a two-piece doom band, yet their gift for brevity gives these songs a more enduring impact. *Out Of Reach* is knucklehead noise rock with a lysergic sting in the tail; *Mammoth* is freaked out, horribly bleak and dense with distortion; and *Beyond Gone* is acid-fried desert rock for dystopian pessimists. Produced by Petbrick's Wayne Adams, *It Gets Worse* disavows the usual downtempo clichés to get weird and wild instead.

FOR FANS OF: The Shits, Fudge Tunnel, Mountain Caller

DOM LAWSON

LOWLIVES
Freaking Out
SPINEFARM

UK post-grunge rockers keep too much faith with their king

We lost Kurt Cobain 20 years ago, but his spirit remains. In recent years, bands like Narrow Head, Soul Blind and Fleshwater have channelled the 90s Seattle Sound, but Lowlives prefer a more direct approach. The UK quartet's debut channels Nirvana with visceral riffs and howling melodies, sometimes a little too faithfully: *Swan Dive* tries its hand at the Staley / Cantrell harmonies that made Alice In Chains sound equally sick and glorious, while Lee Downer often sounds like he's doing a straight-up Cobain impression. Forming from the ashes of The Defiled, No Devotion and The Ataris, Lowlives' ability to nail a hook results in an album with plenty of energy and some genuine earworms in *Getting High On Being Low* and *Vertigo*, even if *Freaking Out* brings little new to the table.

FOR FANS OF: Nirvana, Soundgarden, The Smashing Pumpkins

DANNII LEIVERS

MATRASS
Cathedrals
LA TAGENTE

Gallic stoner rockers undergo a wondrous transformation

Honing your sound is the first big challenge any band faces, but it takes a courageous one to concede that your initial forays into music composition don't reflect you at your best. French five-piece Matrass have shorn the restrictive stoner trappings of their debut EP *Inner Wars* and embraced the more expansive waters of post-metal. The difference is night and day, with Matrass's bold leap paying dividends. The mid-tempo *Appetite For Comfort*, with its tech-heavy basslines and towering riffs, sounds seismic, especially when paired with *Adrift*, a celestial, uplifting instrumental that showcases the band's technical abilities without devolving into technical posturing. Clémentine Browne's ethereal vocals provide a divine counterpoint, particularly during the band's sludgy moments and smatterings of tasteful sax on the monumental *Silence*. *Cathedrals* is an indubitably successful reset that could one day yield a new star in the post-metal firmament.

FOR FANS OF: Isis, Callisto, Rezn

REMFRY DEDMAN

MY DILIGENCE
Death. Horses. Black.
LISTENABLE

Belgian stoner rockers expand into a morass

This Belgian trio have been in a constant state of evolution since their stoner rock debut in 2015, adding more mature compositions as they go. Now with their fourth album, they've expanded that palette once again to envelop shoegaze, post-, psych and doom metal. All the ingredients are there in the punchy opening number *Death*, but the mix soon becomes watered down to a point of not giving much to grab onto. Where *Interlude (The Bridle And The Bit)* should glitter, it serves only to procrastinate; where *Sacred Anchor* should cap the album with a flourish, it trundles out in a whimper. There are no standout moments in a blancmange of lofty aspirations and recycled exercises, which instead relies on rising and falling levels of intensity. Much like the tide, the patterns become predictable, and only interesting enough to take in for a short while.

FOR FANS OF: Elder, Ohhms, Torche

JACK TERRY

Kati Rán has sought out the feminine narratives in Nordic lore

KATI RÁN
Sála
SVART

Soul-searching Nordic folk with a warrior heart

KATI RÁN'S LONG-ANTICIPATED solo album emerges as a vast musical odyssey that weaves a bewitching array of musical styles into a backdrop for exploring the feminine themes within Norse mythology. Building on the epic, oceanic prelude of its 15-minute single, *Blodbylgje*, *Sála*'s 13 immersive tracks are underpinned by traditional folk instrumentation, lush choral harmonies and even a rare lava stone marimba, heard on *Stone Pillars* – a haunting elegy that features vocals from extreme metal icon Gaahl and Napalm Death's Mitch Harris.

Kati weaves narratives from threads of ancient lore and raw, personal revelation, heard in the title track and *Kólga*, a spectral hymn confronting female persecution through the ages. While *Dröfn* and *Dúfa* are atmospheric interludes between shifting states of consciousness, *Segið Mér* and *Bára* deliver primal jolts with shouted vocals and steady, thudding cadences. However, Sála's most striking moments emerge in its subtle introspection – in the hushed intimacy of *Himinglæva*'s vocal harmonies, or in *Hefring*'s mournful drone.

Kati's vocal delivery is a kaleidoscope of emotive forces, shifting from hauntingly ethereal whispers to chants, each modality infusing the album with a vast depth of feeling. Despite this variety, there's a resonant clarity that binds her performances, guiding listeners through its mystical realms. The journey concludes with *Sátta*, a serene culmination of peace and reconciliation that epitomises *Sála*'s fragile beauty.

Recorded in Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands, *Sála* features contributions from members of various pagan folk bands and the Icelandic female choir Umbra Ensemble, rendering *Sála* as collaborative as it is transformative. It stands as a fearless spiritual quest – a testament to the power of art to navigate the soul's depths and emerge tranquil and whole.

FOR FANS OF: Myrkur, Wardruna, Nanna Barslev

JOE DALY

PRESS/RUBEN TERLOUW @WOEDANS

Rezn have hit the bleakest of peaks

REZN
Burden
SARGENT HOUSE

Chicago's psych/doom pilgrims bring their amps to the abyss

AFTER BLAZING A trail in the underground with four self-released albums, these once-fiercely DIY psychedelic doomsters have joined forces with Sargent House to help forge their next chapter. Born alongside previous album *Solace* three years ago in a studio in Illinois and then promptly put on the shelf, *Burden* is an altogether different beast compared to its brother. While their fourth album, which was sent out into the wild last year, was an ethereal, sometimes euphoric listen, their latest LP is a murkier, heavier and more menacing experience that sees them turn the amps up to the proverbial 11 and sound all the better for it.

Lean in length but loaded with ideas, the seven-track album explores themes of delirium, claustrophobia and misery, and the Chicago quartet fortify their celestial and cinematic doom with elements of shoegaze, sludge, prog and post-metal. Built around singer/guitarist Rob McWilliams' dream-like angelic vocals and nightmarish riffs, which have been summoned up from somewhere south of heaven, the likes of the hypnotic and hook-laden *Instinct* and Middle Eastern-inspired space rocker *Bleak Patterns* really impress.

Synth, sax and flute player Spencer Ouellette sits on the subs bench for most of the record due to Rezn's more primal and direct approach, but when he does appear, he delivers some stellar performances – especially on the Pink Floyd-flavoured, slow-burning fever dream of *Soft Prey*, which boasts some soulful soloing.

Album standout *Chasm* closes proceedings in jaw-dropping style. Featuring chugging riffs, spine-chilling white noise and a dizzying guitar solo from Russian Circles' Mike Sullivan, its depiction of the final phase of an existential descent is an unforgettable soundtrack to a tumble toward the abyss. Bleak and abrasive, *Burden* signals a bold and brilliant new era for the band.

FOR FANS OF: Elder, Russian Circles, And So I Watch You From Afar

EDWIN McFEE

NOCTURNUS AD
Unicursal
PROFOUND LORE

Death metal's sci-fi pioneers bring a new wave of cosmic horror

Drummer/singer Mike Browning formed Nocturnus in 1987 after leaving Morbid Angel – a band he co-founded circa 1983. But of all the pioneers of Floridian death metal, the story of Nocturnus was one of the more inglorious. Launching with 1990's cast-iron classic *The Key*, Mike was ousted after his remaining bandmates trademarked the name, patching together one final LP in 1999 before quitting. It took 20 years, but Mike's return as Nocturnus AD with stellar comeback *Paradox* gave this story the beginning of a happy ending that gets even happier with *Unicursal*, an album that vigorously zeroes in on this band's many magical strengths. This was the first DM band of its era to integrate sci-fi keyboards and progressive arrangements, and *Unicursal* finds the optimal balance between visceral directness and virtuosic flair, yielding one delirious hour of cosmic horror madness.

FOR FANS OF: Morbid Angel, Atheist, Pestilence

CHRIS CHANTLER

RARITY
Lower Feeling
NEW DAMAGE

Post-hardcore crew prove more resilient than remarkable

Rarity market themselves as post-hardcore, yet *Lower Feeling* couldn't be further from the qualifying elements. The high-energy and heavy characteristics of post-hardcore are replaced with dreary, dated vocals. The tedious riffs fail to interest or inspire, and Rarity's lack of identity continues to pierce through the likes of *Okay* and *Sick To My Stomach*, where repetitive lyrics and unimaginative choruses leave little impression. Having risen from the ashes many times following legal battles, personal struggles, and line-up changes, *Lower Feeling* sounds far from a victory statement.

FOR FANS OF: Dance Gavin Dance, Don Broco, Chiodos

CHERI FAULKNER

RED ROT
Borders Of Mania
HAMMERHEART

Ex-Ephel Duath members turn to death metal dissonance

Comprised of two ex-members of Italian experimentalists Ephel Duath, Red Rot play twisted, dissonant death metal in surprisingly compact, hardcore-like pieces. The vocals are a monotonous rhythmic bark, but they aren't afraid to amplify the strangeness with baritone clean singing. When they're barrelling into a barbaric riff as on *Agony Untold*, ornamented with fret-melting weirdness, it's pretty irrepressible, and an easy step into the world of discordant DM in general. What borders on mania, though, is that this thing is 15 songs long. They're short, but the album's not paced in any significant way as to mitigate their similarity, making for a bit of a soup by the end.

FOR FANS OF: Morbid Angel, Immolation, Mithras

PERRAN HELYES

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

ABREAKTION
Bornhatred
CHAOS

Hailing from Chile, Abreaktion sound like a reinvigoration of 80s Bay Area thrash. *Empty Promises* channels the raw savagery of the scene, while the twin guitar leads deal in some extra majestic melody.

MATT MILLS

AMEN CORNER
Written By The Devil
METAL ARMY

These lurid Brazilians are 30-plus years into a black metal career, but it remains a particularly far-flung strain, embracing the creepy weirdness of Samael and Mortuary Drape rather than Nordic orthodoxy.

CHRIS CHANTLER

ESODIC
De Facto De Jure
SELF-RELEASED

Hardcore, thrash, death and Middle Eastern folk instrumentation are fair game for the border-blurring Esodic. This livid, groove metal exotica confirms that the Jordanian trio's instincts are correct.

DOM LAWSON

PRESS

RELIQA
Secrets Of The Future
NUCLEAR BLAST

Progressive metalcore futurists set out on a singular trip

Sydney's Reliqa have an undeniable spark. Rather than squeezing into the alt or prog-metalcore mould, *Secrets Of The Future* exists in its own world of tempo shifts, tech-injected synths and monolithic breakdowns. The album covers a slew of progressive textures with reckless abandon; from *Cave*'s space-tinged mystique to *Terminal*'s rush of pulsing electronicore, Reliqa approach songwriting with a sense of wonder. Vocalist Monique Pym tackles each track with just as much joy, effortlessly adapting to any given style. Ethereal vocals float alongside eerie whispers on *Keep Yourself Awake*, while frantic spoken rap-rock is unleashed on *The Flower* and *Crossfire*. Bold, vibrant, and boundlessly creative, Reliqa are a sign that the future of metalcore is in safe hands.

FOR FANS OF: Spiritbox, Void Of Vision, Periphery

EMILY SWINGLE

RHAPSODY OF FIRE
Challenge the Wind
AFM

Italy's power metal veterans bring back the magic

Since visionary composer Luca Turilli left Rhapsody Of Fire in 2011, the power metal band's latter-day career has never quite sparkled like it did in their late-90s heyday. In need of innovation in their fantasy epics, the quintet's revitalised MO on *Challenge The Wind* couldn't have come at a better time. Opening with the title track, ROF are straight into film-score territory with layered vocals, bullet-speed drums and Roberto De Micheli's trigger-finger fretwork. The band then blast through nine more tracks of fast and flashy symphonic metal, substantiating their "no ballads" policy for this album. Sixteen-minute epic *Vanquished By Shadows* is a highlight, all orchestral stabs, heavy riffing and surprisingly harsh vocals from Giacomo Voli. There's some way to go to match Luca Turilli's hit factory, but this slick, pacey, attitude-packed approach sees remaining co-founder Alex Staropoli delivering the goods.

FOR FANS OF: Nightwish, Stratovarius, Dragonforce

HOLLY WRIGHT

SEVERE TORTURE
Torn From The Jaws Of Death
SEASON OF MIST

The Netherlands' brutal death legends restart the slaughter

Despite being silent for 14 years, Severe Torture were always such a terrifying proposition that further carnage was always a possibility. *Torn From The Jaws Of Death* picks up exactly where 2010's *Slaughtered* left off, but with more explosions of bone-splintering brutality, executed with fearsome precision. This band were always sharper and more agile than the brutal death average, and while songs like *The Death Of Everything* and *Hogtied In Rope* serve up plenty of insane blasting and evil heft, there are also numerous flashes of dark, progressive melody that emerge triumphantly, like bolts of light from a swirling miasma of stricken flesh. The band that brought us gore-soaked classics like 2002's *Misanthropic Carnage* may have matured slightly over the years, but their famous ferocity remains unaffected. The result is a masterclass in bloodthirsty thuggery with brains to burn.

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Blood Red Throne, Aborted

DOM LAWSON

SHRAPNEL
In Gravity
CANDLELIGHT

Anglican thrashers find a new lease of life

There was a time when Norwich thrashers Shrapnel were seemingly everywhere, always threatening to explode into the spotlight but never quite making that a reality. *In Gravity*, the quartet's fourth record, finds them revitalised and, to an extent, reborn. The breakneck tempos and full-throttle riffs are still present, but there's a new metalcore element that's taken them to the next level. Now, as on the excellent *Guardian*, they're combining furious fretwork with seismic, melodic choruses, while new-ish vocalist Daniel Moran puts in a stellar performance. Bleed From Within's Scott Kennedy adds his savage voice to the blistering, opening title track, and the closing *Absolution*, which brings things down a notch, is no less crushing. If you ever wanted a definition of the term 'brimming with confidence', this is Exhibit A.

FOR FANS OF: Trivium, Sylosis, Evile

ELLIOT LEAVER

Thou are going through a period of adjustment

THOU
Umbilical
SACRED BONES

Louisiana's ever-shifting sludge maestros return to their visceral roots

AFTER ALMOST TWO decades of existence, Thou have proven themselves to be one of the most versatile, adventurous and innovative sludge bands of their generation. But just as it seemed the band might be mellowing with age, along comes *Umbilical* with all the brute force of a stampeding herd of elephants.

While 2014's *Heathen* and 2018's *Magus* were glacially paced, 70-minute behemoths that took several spins to fully entangle, this sixth album is arguably the most immediate, visceral record Thou have ever released. Drawing influence from obscure 90s DIY hardcore as much as sludge metal, songs like *Emotional Terrorist* and *Lonely Vigil* really emphasise the propulsive force of the band's hulking great grooves, eschewing *Magus*'s grungier, introspective atmosphere in favour of a far more aggressive bludgeoning. Lead single *I Feel Nothing When You Cry* is uncharacteristically brisk, giving drummer Tyler Coburn a chance to show off his chops, with blistering double-kick rolls powering some of the most mosh-ready riffs the band have concocted yet.

Even the album's more atmospheric moments bristle with an uncomfortable tension. The yearning, reverb-smothered guitar wails gliding across monolithic valleys of detuned chug on *House Of Ideas* and the harrowing clean chords in *I Return As Chained And Bound To You* – one of the few times *Umbilical* eases off the intensity – lean more towards confrontational noise rock textures than sentimental post-rock soundscapes.

Umbilical feels like a return to Thou's roots in many ways, somehow matching the youthful energy of their 2007 debut while sounding even more energised and ferocious. This isn't to disparage their recent work at all, as both *Heathen* and *Magus* are classics in their own right. But after such exhaustive, longform statements, it's incredibly refreshing to hear Thou cutting loose and just rocking out with such gleeful enthusiasm.

FOR FANS OF: Eyehategod, Primitive Man, Vile Creature

KEZ WHELAN

PRESS

Ufomammut: "Don't look around the eyes, look into the eyes..."

UFOMAMMUT
Hidden
NEUROT

Italy's doom-psych overlords bring on the bliss and the battery

"AIMING FOR A more intense and heavy sound" is the pleasing intention behind these Italian psych-doom scene leaders' 11th album, and the obsessive focus on Poia's body-buckling guitars and Levre's hammering backbeats barely flags over the 45-minute runtime. Head-caving sludge doom action is shunted to the fore. Psychedelic synthesiser sound effects still swirl around like birds circling the head of a cartoon character who just got brained by an anvil, but the Tortona trio don't fully unleash the trancey, fractal-display wig-out vibes until *Mausoleum*. It's the fourth song of six, coming after nearly half an hour of crushing chops, crackling tones and walloping drumskins. Four-minute closer *Soulost* is the only tune here that's more psych than doom, with its sedated vocal harmonies, woozy synths and whooshing trails of panoramic wah-wah, although of course the hallucinogenic jam energy is maintained throughout.

Album opener *Crookhead* was showcased on an EP last year, but this extended, enriched LP version has far greater urgency and tension, the marauding lead riff acting rather like the pre-credits sequence in a giallo movie, dropping us straight into a world of dread and sinister intent. Riffs advance in such throbbing abundance you can almost smell the smoke from maxed-out valves mingling with the other sort of smoke, but this is not your standard warm, fuzzy, stoner groove party. There's a frenzied attack to the delivery reflected in Urlo's harsh, hoarse, shouted vocals, and although some riffs are so basic they sound like they've been vamped on the spot by a curious child who just picked up a guitar for the first time, there are occasional tricksy transitions and unexpected, fleeting tempo switches. It all ensures the listener can never quite relax into a sonic comfort zone for long before an unnerving chord progression sends the blissful trip spiralling into a very dark place.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Hawkwind, Electric Wizard

CHRIS CHANTLER

SIG:AR:TYR
Citadel Of Stars
HAMMERHEART

Ontario's one-man pagan black metal band pines for the cosmos

The fifth album in 20 years for this atmospheric, folky, pagan black metal project binds nature-worshipping, pine-scented BM tropes with the void-worshipping, cosmos-scented variant. This one-man band is largely propelled by the icy mist of Daemonskald's guitar tone and frostbitten vocal hiss, as tempos vary from epic plod to rocking stomp to stormy blast. However, the acoustic flourishes provide far more than just pretty breathers amid the predominant jagged distortion; S:A:T's 2003 demo (appended to the deluxe edition) was wholly acoustic and infused with ambient Viking camp fire vibes, and these qualities still hang heavy over *Citadel Of Stars*, its melancholy melodies twinkling in the gloom like moonlit snowfall.

FOR FANS OF: Bathory, Immortal, Agalloch

CHRIS CHANTLER

SOCK
3243
MINUS HEAD

Will Haven and Far members' long-lost early foray gets unearthed

For those in the 1990s Sacramento scene, Sock were a name spoken of in hushed tones. They featured future Far guitarist Shaun Lopez alongside Will Haven riffer Jeff Irwin (here on drums) and vocalist Grady Avenell, and fans of both cult bands will be desperate to hear this remaster of their 1995 album. A chance to finally experience the band, as well as a fascinating document of some hugely respected musicians in their infancy, it's unlikely they'll be disappointed. There's the odd touch of Far's more sensitive and melodic bent on songs such as *Motor*, but the main takeaway is just how astonishing Grady's unique, larynx-destroying wail always sounded alongside crushing groove riffs. It's not quite up to the standard of their best work, but you can tell these young men would go on to make something special.

FOR FANS OF: Will Haven, Coalesce, Snapcase

STEPHEN HILL

SUFFERING SOULS
An Iconic Taste Of Demise
SATANATH / FETZNER DEATH

Symphonic black metal solo project toes the genre line

Despite now being in their 30th year of activity, Suffering Souls have never exactly ignited the symphonic black metal underground. The solo project of German vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Tobias Micko, under the pseudonym Lord Esgaroth, has released just five albums in three decades, with *An Iconic Taste Of Demise* ending a five-year dry spell. However, the music on this latest LP also suggests that a lack of imagination has stopped Tobias from reaching his genre's upper echelons. These 55 minutes overflow with roars, quasi-operatic backing singing and orchestras, yet never escape the shadow of such genre masters as Dimmu Borgir and Septicflesh. Songs like

PRESS

From Hubris To Demise and instrumental *Of Clarity And Hysteria* are bombastic enough, and *In The Order Of Doom* packs some refreshingly mid-paced groove, but there's nothing that will draw back anyone except the most ardent symphonic BM loyalists.

FOR FANS OF: Dimmu Borgir, Septicflesh, Ihsahn

MATT MILLS

SUNNATA
Chasing Shadows
SELF-RELEASED

Poland's expansive doom crew aim for an alpha state

Everything changed for Sunnata on 2018's *Outlands* album, which saw the Polish quartet break out of their doom mould for a much more 'out there' framework. Album five, *Chasing Shadows*, makes *Outlands* seem conservative by comparison. An introspective journey, its tracks are mostly multi-textured, hazy, slow-burn affairs, with guitar licks that dance and dissipate in the aether and a focus on the dour, harmonised vocals of guitarists Szymon Ewertowski and Adrian Gadomski. *Chimera* sees their complementary huskiness intertwine over serpentine bass and ritualistic percussion, proving mantra-like at the apex as hell breaks loose. Just as *Saviour's Raft*'s chanting begins to drag, a leviathan of a riff shakes you from your reverie. Sunnata's cerebral doom veers between the mesmeric and the somnambulant, and by the sounds of it, not even they are sure where it's leading them.

FOR FANS OF: Tool, Yob, Alice In Chains

TOM O'BOYLE

THE TROOPS OF DOOM
A Mass To The Grotesque
ALMA MATER

Badass Brazilian thrash from a proper metal legend

Jairo 'Tormentor' Guedz is Brazilian metal royalty. He played guitar on Sepultura's seminal first few records, including the song that gave his current band their name. Firmly tethered to a none-more-Brazilian death/thrash sound, The Troops Of Doom were full of conviction on 2022 debut *Antichrist Reborn*, and the follow-up is equally commanding. *A Mass...* is full of old-school songs with plenty of dirt under their fingernails, but with ruthless precision and a gritty modern production. Songs like *Chapels Of The Unholy* and *Terror Inheritance* are still pouring out of Jairo, nearly 40 years after he helped kickstart metal's South American revolution. Very much the real deal, The Troops Of Doom will thrash you senseless.

FOR FANS OF: Sepultura, Sodom, Sadus

DOM LAWSON

WITHERFALL
Sounds Of The Forgotten
DEATHWAVE

LA genre-hoppers come up with something extraordinary

Witherfall clearly love their metal, but they also have a deep appreciation of melody, and don't care who knows it. This fourth LP is a captivating mix of both styles, from the intricate to the ball-busting, and everything in-between, laced with apocalyptic shredding and Joseph Michael's growls, banshee wails and occasionally eerie hard rock delivery. *Where Do I Begin?* is a lighter-waving ode to the staying power of heavy metal in neo-classical-prog-freakout power ballad form, that answers the question of what would have happened had Nevermore and the Scorpions teamed up. It's magnificent, and the remainder of *Sounds...* ain't too shabby either.

FOR FANS OF: Nevermore, Iced Earth, King Diamond

DAVE LING

WITHERING SURFACE
Exit Plan
MIGHTY MUSIC

Reunited Danes stoke the melodeath flames once more

Melodic DM's staying power has depended on never straying too far from the formula. This second album since Withering Surface's 2019 comeback stays largely within bounds. Here, the veterans incorporate the subgenre's various moods to create a veritable best-of. Michael H. Anderson's severe vocals lend themselves to the more vicious *Where Dreamers Die* and sinister writhing of *The Oracle*, and in the glorious thrashing of *I Finally Lost (All Faith In Humanity)* and galloping *Not The Destination*, Marco Angioni and Allan Tvedebrink muster some of melodeath's tastiest twin lead duels for years. Scintillating leads sit alongside the perverse hooks of *Denial Denial Denial* and *Finish What You Started*, while the mid-paced closer *Mindreader* allows WS to flex more epic muscles.

FOR FANS OF: In Flames, Dark Tranquillity, The Black Dahlia Murder

ADAM BRENNAN

Umbra Vitae re-emerge from death metal's shadows

UMBRA VITAE
Light Of Death
DEATHWISH INC.

Jacob Bannon-fronted masters get a death metal upgrade

THE PROMISE OF Converge frontman Jacob Bannon being joined by The Red Chord bassist Greg Weeks and guitarist Mike McKenzie, Uncle Acid/former Job for A Cowboy drummer Jon Rice, and Twitching Tongues guitarist Sean Martin, *and* attempting to make classic-sounding death metal, was enough to make the ears of anyone with a penchant for brutal music prick up. Therefore, when Umbra Vitae's debut album, *Shadow Of Life*, arrived in 2020, it was an immediate must-hear. Looking back, however, it didn't quite live up to the hype. It was decent, extremely good in parts, but clearly the sound of a collective still finding their feet.

Those feet have absolutely been firmly planted now, because *Light Of Death* is a superior album to that debut in every single metric you could judge it by. Twice as long, and with five more tracks than its predecessor, it's an record that uses that extra runtime to explore the dynamics of the genre far more Umbra Vitae did previously. The gooey, half-time thump, gurgling gang chants and shredding solos of *Anti-Spirit Machine* sit next to the thrashing, utterly destructive grind of *Reality In Retrograde*. There's even some acoustic flamenco guitar on the album's longest song, the fantastically chaotic *Cause & Effect*.

As ever, Kurt Ballou deserves a nod for his superb production. Jacob Bannon screams and snarls as though his head is about to explode like that bloke from the *Scanners* movie, but the real stars of the show are Sean Martin and Mike McKenzie. They run through a riff repertoire worthy of death metal's finest, aping Trey Azagthoth one minute, James Murphy the next, and throwing in some of their own hardcore influences while they're at it. A significant step up, and, in a hotly contested race, quite possibly one of 2024's finest death metal albums.

FOR FANS OF: Blood Incantation, Obituary, Hate Eternal

STEPHEN HILL

PRESS/HILLARIE JASON

LIVE REVIEWS

INFERNO FESTIVAL 2024

ROCKEFELLER / JOHN DEE, OSLO

Norway's long-running extreme metal gathering unlocks the trve power of progression

IF YOU WERE a visitor to Inferno in its inaugural early 2000s, one event you not have expected is Drag Metal Bingo. Hosted by drag artists Erik Sjonn and Jessica Fuckit in the bar of the festival's official, rather plush hotel, The Clarion Hub, it's a mark of a festival able to move with the times, and still know its extreme metal base.

The festival still hosts 1,500 metal-heads next to one of Oslo's main tourist shopping districts, but the vibe has shifted over the years in line with the scene itself. The crowd are less the black metal fashion show that it used to be, the atmosphere has become more relaxed, and for all the recirculation of top-line acts, it continues to attract new, younger and international visitors. It's a festival that feels comfortable in its own skin, where a continued acknowledgment of extreme metal's roots stands side by side with a progressive outlook.

For the first two days, The Hub hosts a range of conferences and discussions for both industry and paying punters. There's an address by regular booth-holder Leif Munkelien, founder of the long-running Metalheads Against Bullying organisation, as well as talks covering a range of topics from the role of influencers in the extreme scene, to the rise of AI, combating hate speech, the dos and don'ts of writing books about black metal, and the experiences of female extreme metal artists across the years. The festival also puts on hiking trips into Oslo's surrounding mountains, and a tour of Oslo's black metal hotspots – hosted with intimate, myth-busting knowledge by Cadaver, Satyricon and brief Mayhem member Anders Odden, it's largely a history of Mayhem that takes in scenes of famous band photo shoots, founder Euronymous's grave, the Holmenkollen Chapel stave church (rebuilt after black metal's wave of church burnings), and the Neseblod record shop (formerly Euronymous's infamous base of operations, Helvete).

All this makes Inferno a unique experience, where every aspect is thought out, and part of a collective sense of bonhomie that runs counter to those who still claim the scene's a repository for our worst instincts.

Orbit Culture claw their way into Oslo's good books

Denmark's **KONVENT** kick off the festival proper in the main Rockefeller hall on the Thursday in hypnotic style, their ominous death-doom unfurling around Rikke Emilie List's coruscating howl, reaching an overwhelming critical mass as if by some undetectable process of osmosis. Downstairs at the John Dee, much-touted death metal newbies **NAKKEKNAEKKER** are a burst of youthful exuberance, but if it's some old-school atmosphere you're after, **CRYPTA** have it in abundance. Super-tight, but with the rawest, most lacerating of edges, tracks such as *Trial Of Traitors* careen down labyrinthine passageways with an emotional urgency that has a packed room in their thrall. **NORDJEVEL** and **KAMPFAR** fly the flag for classic BM (literally, with a Norwegian flag customarily held sideways to become an inverted cross), the former a sonic whorl of razorblade riffs, the latter celebrating their 30th anniversary with a history-scouring journey, as singer Dolk sounds like he's heaving them across rugged terrain.

If **VLTIMAS** are a well-drilled juggernaut on the Friday, **CARPATHIAN FOREST** are a hot mess, a frazzled-looking Nattefrost randomly tooting into a harmonica, as images are projected of him in hospital with tubes up his nose, before duetting with his son for Turbonegro's *All My Friends Are Dead*. **SÓLSTAFIR** psychically terraform Rockefeller afterwards, the graceful elides of *Fjara* and *Ótta* transfixing the crowd, before Addi's reaching towards countless upheld hands during *Goddess Of The Ages* becomes a potent moment. Even without Hoest upfront tonight, 2015's *Instinctus Bestialis* vocalist, Atterigner, leads **GORGOROTH** through a set of incendiary classics to reset the black metal compass.

For all their more modern trappings, **ORBIT CULTURE** go down a storm on the Saturday, their densely calibrated grooves driving an ever-expanding wall of sound. Give or take three fucking idiots, the John Dee has never been so hushed as **JO QUAIL** builds up layer upon layer from her cello as if something newborn is being woven from space and time. Considering **BORKNAGAR** frontman ICS Vortex was uncermoniously kicked out of **DIMMU BORGIR** – along with keyboardist Mustis – in 2009, with no hint of reconciliation on the cards since, the fact that both bands are playing back to back seems a bit odd. That's until the headliners bring both him *and* Mustis on for *The Insight And The Catharsis*, the fist bump between ICS and Shagrath suggesting hatchets are now buried. The Rockefeller's so packed, a single cough causes a chain reaction across the venue, and tonight they're an imperious victory march that peaks with the cinematic sweep of *Progenies Of The Great Apocalypse*.

Utterly committed to the moment like they're undergoing some diabolical G-force, **MISÞYRMING**'s arise-from-the-miasma black metal on Sunday proves you don't need outward showmanship to captivate a crowd, but you do need *some* stage presence, as **WINTERFYLLETH** fail to get the rousing response their music deserves. **FINNTROLL** prove that not even Inferno is immune to mass jigging, or conga lines, but the festival ends in suitably incendiary style. **KOLDBRANN**'s punked-up BM is a full-on adrenaline rush, **TAAKE** even more so upstairs. Hoest's singular charisma drives an ever-cresting wave, as if the four horsemen of the apocalypse are forming and foaming at its apex, bringing the festival to an exhilarating state of abandon.

JONATHAN SELZER

THE SET
DIMMU BORGIR

Raabjørn Speiler
Draugheimens Skodde
Spellbound (By The Devil)
Entrance
The Insight And The Catharsis
Stormblåst
Dødsferd
The Chosen Legacy
Ætheric
Council Of Wolves And Snakes
Dimmu Borgir
Fear And Wonder
Blessings Upon The Throne Of Tyranny
Progenies Of The Great Apocalypse
Mourning Palace

Dimmu Borgir raise the spirits and the rafters

Sólstafir offer Inferno grace and space

Konvent invoke the full power of death-doom

Kampfar unleash an attention-grabbing set

PRESS/UNCLE ALLAN

Carpathian Forest: Nordic ambassadors of ill-will

Taake: Hoest makes his presence count

Crypta's Fernanda Lira: death-dealer extraordinaire

LIVE REVIEWS

ROADBURN 2024

013 / THE TERMINAL, TILBURG

Chelsea Wolfe, Khanate and Blood Incantation take Tilburg to the outer limits

"ARE YOU HERE for the heavy metal festival?" The barman in Tilburg asks us an innocuous question with a complicated answer. Over the past 25 years, Roadburn has evolved from stoner/doom/psych roots to a haven for cutting-edge alternative sounds – including album-in-full and specially commissioned sets – making it a truly special annual event. And as a sympathetic Dutch local offers *Hammer* a free beer to assuage our tiredness following flight delays, we're reminded that Roadburn has also developed in line with an ethos of making the world a nicer place, if only for one weekend each April. Prost!

Spring has arrived in Tilburg, but its warmth doesn't reach **HEXVESSEL**'s *Polar Veil* set. It's tinged with the frosty, sparse atmosphere of black metal, while barren, twisted branches spread across the stage lend an air of theatricality. There's no such artifice for **BODY VOID**. Lead-weighted sludge set against a maelstrom of abrasive noise, The Terminal stage's pitch-black interior perfectly reflects *Atrocity Machine*'s punishing extremity.

Roadburn is no stranger to hip hop, But 2024 sees a more direct embrace of the genre's most alternative edges. **CLIPPING**. deliver hackle-raising horrorcore with clanging industrial beats, while **LORD SPIKEHEART** carries over some of the manic, wall-climbing energy of his role fronting Kenyan grindcore-noise mavericks Duma. Playing the first of two festival sets, **ROYAL THUNDER** power their way through early tracks *Whispering World* and *Parsonz Curse* to reveal their kick-ass yet progressive garage rock roots. Mlny Parsonz looks like she's trying to contain an explosive charge, finally letting loose as she jumps down into a thronging, second stage crowd. But it's the surprise return of **BACKXWASH** as Thursday's main stage closer that feels most dramatic, striking visuals meeting a set that, while imperfect, hints at a stylistic shift away from her recent trap metal stylings.

CHELSEA WOLFE is like a throwback to the festival's roots – she first played in 2012. Her main stage appearance sees transcendental imagery meet thrumming electronica and gothic, doomy overtones, reaching an otherworldly apex as swirling smoke and lights make it look like a vortex is opening up behind the singer during an acoustic rendition of *The Liminal*.

Boney M. provide a surprisingly suitable prep soundtrack for Friday's specially commissioned **MAT McNERNEY** *Music For Gloaming* set. The *ra-ra-Rasputins* might be absent, but fans bemoaning the lack of strings in modern music can delight in the sight of a violinist swaying to baroque black metal-meets-gothic doom.

The surprise hit of the festival is **BLOOD INCANTATION**. Playing their ambient *Timewave Zero* album in full, under purple laser lights gently scanning the biggest crowd the main stage will see all Roadburn – until their space and time-warping death metal set on the Saturday, at least – they embark on a Moog-cushioned 70s sci-fi odyssey, all velveteen pulses and otherworldly lights reflected off spacesuit visors. It's mesmerising.

Despite their relatively sparse production – just a white canvas backdrop to soak up the stage lights – **DOOL**'s rendition of new album *The Shape Of Fluidity* is awash in dramatic flourish. From *Venus In Flames*' burst-into-flame dynamics to *The Hand Of Creation*'s graceful, spent cadences, Raven van Dorst's gliding vocals veer between trepidation and a wonder that becomes contagious through the main arena.

It's become a truism of Roadburn that no sooner have you sat down to tuck into food, a secret set will be announced. A hastily scoffed enchilada and dash later, *Hammer* are in Tilburg's skatepark watching a bloodsoaked Megan Osztrosits howl her way through **COUCH SLUT**'s European live debut. "This song is about when I used to suck dick for drugs as a child," she snarls to introduce *I'm 14*, and bedlam ensues as their unwieldy, disquieting spiky-sludge-noise bellows out. It's a precursor for a somehow *more* distressing set the next morning, as they pair grotesque imagery with the sonic assault of new album *You Could Do It Tonight*. **THE KEENING** might opt for more grandiose sonics, but they're no less venomous. *'I can't wait until I die / So, I won't see you again,'* Rebecca Vernon croons, a perfect summation of the beautiful-yet-brutal chamber-goth stylings of her post-Subrosa project.

It's a shame **ROYAL THUNDER**'s own full-album *Rebuilding The Mountain* set is played to a third-full main hall, and even if *Live To Live* is five minutes of gloriously tear-jerking, end-of-the-road epiphany, there isn't enough energy for the band to feed off and make these songs truly catch fire. Meanwhile, US duo **PATRIARCHY** get to the sleaze-ridden heart of 80s industrial and EBM, vocalist Actually Huizenga a corpsepainted Harley Quinn intent on leading outcasts even further astray. There's further industrial transgression from **LANA DEL RABIES**, clawing her way through purgatorial swarms of noise to an emotional crescendo, telling a still-awed crowd she's been waiting four years to play this festival that still values the power of art. **BIRDS IN ROW**'s run-through of latest album *Gris Klein* becomes an emotionally charged visual extravaganza, swivelling lights and triggered strobes heightening a sensory overload of noisecore that leaves frontman Quentin Sauvé weeping.

The only way **KHANATE**'s set could be more oppressive is if security had the foresight to bolt the doors shut as the main stage filled to capacity. Those who remain for the duration are treated (or punished) with glacial riffs and an unyielding venomous tide of deconstructed doom, Alan Dubin howling with such conviction you'd think he was trying to glimpse God amid the squall of feedback.

To end Roadburn on a high, **GROS COEUR** are on hand, their blend of Afrobeat, psych and bouncy Neu!-riding krautrock grooves sending an ecstatic second stage crowd partying into the final hours.

RICH HOBSON/JONATHAN SELZER

THE SET

CHELSEA WOLFE

Whispers In The Echo Chamber
Everything Turns Blue
House Of Self-Undoing
Tunnel Lights
16 Psyche
The Culling
Feral Love
House Of Metal
Salt
Unseen World
Eyes Like Nightshade
Place In The Sun
Dusk
Flatlands
The Liminal
Be All Things

Chelsea Wolfe: brilliantly gothic

Patriarchy: all in the best possible taste

Lana Del Rabies transports the crowd into purgatory

Couch Slut: Here's Megan!

Dool: Raven puts the 'trident' into 'strident'

Khanate: impressiveley oppressive

Royal Thunder create an emotional alchemy

PRESS. CHELSEA WOLFE, COUCH SLUT, KHANATE, LANA DEL RABIES, PATRIARCHY: KOPIE VAN PETER TROEST. ROYAL THUNDER, DOOL: NIELS VINCK

Blind Guardian reclaim their role as power metal royalty

BLIND GUARDIAN

THE NIGHT ETERNAL

O2 FORUM, LONDON

German heroes bring two hours of power to the capital

'ABSENCE MAKES THE heart grow fonder' may be a cliché, but… turns out it's true. Despite it being eight years since London last hosted a show by Blind Guardian, the capital's love for the conquering power metal champions clearly hasn't waned a bit. Tonight's auditorium is completely sold out and, when they arrive, the headliners will be greeted like hometown heroes – 340 miles away from their actual hometown.

THE NIGHT ETERNAL commence proceedings not with the sword, sorcery and falsetto you'd expect from a night like this, but rather a goth-pop metal march. Standouts such as *In Tartarus* and *Prince Of Darkness* flaunt the Germans' melancholic and melodic guitar leads, yet it's vocalist Ricardo Baum who steals the show. When his voice isn't rising from Jaz Coleman-like howls to croons as capable as Tobias Forge's, he's a hair-whipping showman. That vigour swiftly gets Kentish Town engaged with these up-and-comers, clapping and headbanging throughout the set.

The adulation pales in comparison to the heroes' welcome that **BLIND GUARDIAN** beget. Opener *Imaginations From The Other Side* instantly declares how they earned such passion. Though this six-piece set the blueprint for the power metal genre with their mythical themes and Hansi Kürsch's flighty vocals, their thunderous speed metal riffs and pinch harmonics offset all that splendour with genuine oomph.

Blood Of The Elves, from 2022's uber-heavy *The God Machine*, keeps that energy alive, after which it becomes clear the band are enjoying themselves just as much as their followers. Hansi takes to the mic between every single song to revel in the adulation and thank a capacity crowd that can't stop chanting "Guard-i-an! Guard-i-an!" Later, the audience sing *The Bard's Song – In The Forest* in its entirety with minimal help from the performers proper, and, after the ending of *Valhalla*, they keep shouting the track's hook for minutes on end.

Such a special turnout is complemented by a special setlist. *Banish From Sanctuary* appears for only the third time this year to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the *Follow The Blind* album, before London's treated to a legitimately impromptu second encore. As Blind Guardian blaze through *Majesty* – another coalition of speed and power metal, endowed with one hell of a refrain – it reaffirms how much they deserve their venerated status. You could count on one hand the number of bands that tried to sound like this one and ended up feeling even half as special.

MATT MILLS

INGESTED

FALLUJAH

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

The Underworld is already heaving by the time **FALLUJAH** take the stage. Despite their role as a support band, the US tech-death collective boast a following comparable to tonight's headliner, given they're responsible for more than a decade of melodic, progressive sophistication. New vocalist Kyle Schaefer proves his worth, rocketing from bowel-quaking roars to majestic singing in an instant. The venue is slightly less crammed when self-professed 'slam kings' **INGESTED** show up, but those remaining make efficient use of the space. From the moment the Mancunians arrive, a human whirlpool opens up, and the enthusiasm is so great that someone has to be carried out of the melee midway through the opening song. However, frontman Jay Evans is charismatic enough to never let the good times dissipate. The singer, while encouraging safety, keeps his crowd as enthused and active as possible all evening. Circle-pits, fist-pumping and Slipknot-esque jump-the-fuck-ups turn tonight into a sweat-drenched death metal workout. Of course, sonically, Ingested offer about as much diversity as a KFC menu, but the nonstop adrenaline is what makes this set special. It's easy to believe Jay when he says this is the best headline gig the band have ever played.

MATT MILLS

MOUNTAIN CALLER

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Mountain Caller's second album, *Chronicle II: Hypergenesis*, is a sprawling concoction of dense, fantastical, proggy post-metal, and it's testament to their status in the UK scene that tonight's playthrough of the spellbinding release is sold out. "Hello, we're your friendly neighbourhood Mountain Caller," bassist El Reeve grins, before the propulsive *Daybreak* begins their set. They more than live up to their name, conjuring towering riffs and leads that wind their way up to peaks before plunging back down into abyssal, sludgy depths. *The Archivist* breaks the mostly instrumental tradition to bring forth soft vocals from El before its cataclysmic crescendo, while *Dead Language* revels in a disco beat, as well as a furiously sludgy breakdown. It's a fresh and vital take on prog metal that's only getting better the more Mountain Caller play together. Crucially, they're also adept at bringing people with them on their voyage; the capacity crowd are ecstatic to see the trio in such fine form, and more than a few seem to lose themselves entirely. It's a thrilling show from one of the UK's brightest young bands.

WILL MARSHALL

WILL IRELAND

BRUCE DICKINSON

WHISKY A GO GO, LOS ANGELES

Iron Maiden's unstoppable frontman takes the West Coast by surprise

IN THE DAYS leading up to this Friday night, the marquee above LA's storied Whisky A Go Go advertises the gaudily named 'The House Band Of Hell' as that evening's performer. It is, of course, a cheeky ruse by Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson himself, who takes to social media two days before to reveal that The House Band Of Hell are actually him and his solo band. Considering that Bruce hasn't played a live solo show since Tony Blair was PM – Wacken, 2002, to be precise – this announcement doesn't land so much as detonate across the city. In fact, when Lita Ford was performing her Thursday night here, Maiden super-fans were already queuing up for the following night.

With a capacity of 500, the venue offers an uncommon level of intimacy for an icon like Bruce, and by the time doors open at 8pm, throngs of fans decked out in 40 years' worth of Iron Maiden t-shirts have formed a noisy black centipede that winds around the block in both directions. The puzzling lack of an opening band charges the venue with an undercurrent of tension that finally breaks when the band storm out and pile into the powerful strains of *Accident Of Birth* at the stroke of 10. The sound quality is masterful and his current band – guitarists Philip Näslund and Chris Declercq, keyboardist Mistheria, and the propulsive duo of bassist Tanya O'Callaghan and drummer Dave Moreno – are fearsomely tight, playing shoulder-to-shoulder at times on the venue's modest stage.

At 65 years, Bruce's voice remains defiantly unaffected by the passage of time, effortlessly hitting high notes that threaten the structural integrity of California's tectonic plates. The setlist delivers a succulent buffet of first-time live renditions of Bruce classics such as 2005's *Abduction* and 1998's *The Alchemist*, alongside highlights from his latest release, *The Mandrake Project*. Anthemic new material like *Afterglow Of Ragnarok* and *Rain On The Graves* draws rapturous responses, while classics *Tears Of The Dragon* and *Darkside Of Aquarius* reaffirm the brilliance of his extensive solo repertoire. With the band unleashing taut grooves and high-energy vibes all night long, Bruce's undiminished prowess shines brightly, captivating a crowd hanging on every note. A cover of The Edgar Winter Group's *Frankenstein*, complete with Bruce on the Theramin and a cover-within-a-cover of Dio's *Man On The Silver Mountain*, utterly slays. They end the 15-song, 90-minute performance with encores *Jerusalem* and *Road To Hell*.

Bruce Dickinson's stature as one of metal's most vital figures was never in doubt, but tonight's performance issues an emphatic reminder that beyond the confines of Iron Maiden, his solo catalogue stands tall on its own as a thrilling and compelling chapter in the saga of heavy metal. File this show under: 'Once in a lifetime.'

JOE DALY

Bruce Dickinson: the 'M' is for 'Master'

STEPHANIE CABRAL

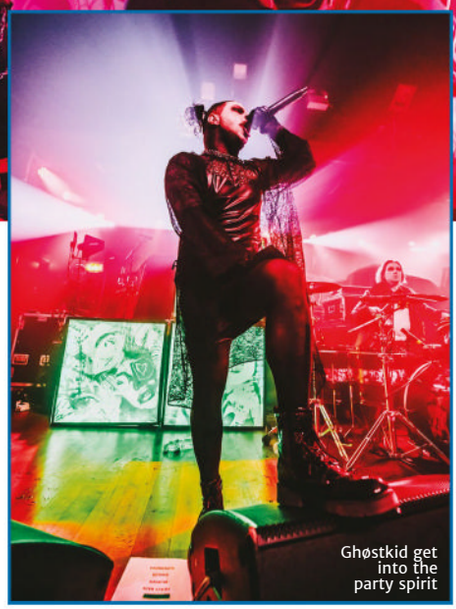
Blind Channel: Joel and Niko refuse to remain static

BLIND CHANNEL

GHØSTKID

SCALA, LONDON

Finland's Eurovision-storming nu metallers get down with the slickness



Ghøstkid get into the party spirit

HAVING REPRESENTED FINLAND in 2021's Eurovision final, self-proclaimed "violent pop" stars Blind Channel have made sure to keep their foot on the gas. Off the back of last March's *Exit Emotions* album, they've clearly been focusing their energy on creating a stellar live show. First, though, German metalcore outfit **GHØSTKID** explode onto the stage to the strains of the thunderous *Hollywood Suicide*. They're scrappy, but when they take their guitars into the pit to play *Start A Fight* amid the swarming crowd, the anticipation of chaos about to unfold makes it a genuinely exciting moment that sets the tone for what's to come.

With the experience of Eurovision in their rear-view, **BLIND CHANNEL** bring the tightness and showmanship of an arena band to a venue that's positively bursting at the seams with adoring fans – numerous handmade signs are held aloft with messages for the bandmembers written in Finnish; mainly variations of 'I love you' – who match the band's high energy and give it back to them tenfold. With frontmen Joel Hokka and Niko Moilanen commanding every inch of the stage with ease, they're certain to outgrow venues this size very quickly.

Such is their commitment to creating an experience for their audience, the show starts long before the band even take to the stage. Their fake station 'Radio Exit' plays over the PA with carefully selected nu metal and Euro-dance tracks designed to amp everyone up before the opening notes of *Deadzone*. At one point, the voice of the Radio Exit host refers to the band as 'the Backstreet Boys of metal' – something they've also said in these pages – and while it's clear they aren't taking themselves *too* seriously, it's also hard not to find some elements of their performance a little contrived.

They blast through songs such as *Over My Dead Body* and the malignant *Not Your Bro* with precision and gusto, but the choreographed movements to *Flatline* are in stark contrast to the teeming, whirling vortex of a circle-pit that has erupted organically on the floor. *Die Another Day* featuring trance vocalist RØRY is a highlight, with the singer's stunning power pop vocal adding another dynamic that ensures the set doesn't lull.

With their playing as tight as it is, Blind Channel could stand to loosen up other aspects of the show a little without detracting from the experience. For now, though, they've more than proven themselves as a formidable live act, ready to move on to bigger and better things.

CATHERINE MORRIS

PUPIL SLICER

COILGUNS

BOOM, LEEDS

Tonight is an attack on the senses in every way. Switzerland's **COILGUNS** haven't played the UK since 2019, and they're greeted with reverence. Exploding onto Boom's tiny stage like a nailbomb made of jagged guitars and torn sinew, their brand of mathy chaos is disorientating and raw. Vocalist Louis Jucker claws at his own face during *Generic Skincare* and ends the set crawling through the pit to enthusiastic cheers. This jaunt is **PUPIL SLICER**'s first headline UK tour, fully deserved given the brilliance of their 2021 debut, *Mirrors*, and remarkable 2023 follow-up, *Blossom*. Their set is almost wholly dedicated to the latter, as they play it in full, and every one of its tracks warrants its moment of destruction in the spotlight. As *Momentary Actuality*'s vicious grind gives way to a dreamy chorus, things don't initially gel, and the song's majestic volte-face is lost, but the sound gremlins are quickly ironed out. A masterclass in control, abandon, melody and relentless extremity follows, led by superstar-in-waiting Kate Davies – a delicate equilibrium that ensures the set's more sensual moments provide almost as much weight as their batshit counterparts. Pupil Slicer are one of the UK's most exciting rising bands, and tonight feels like the start of something beautiful.

DANNII LEIVERS

SYLOSIS

BURNER / HARBINGER

RESCUE ROOMS, NOTTINGHAM

London-based **HARBINGER** have plenty of snarl and presence – along with the odd decent song like *Prayer Of Deliverance* – but their brand of metalcore is often middle-of-the-road fodder that leaves them with a bark far worse than their bite. **BURNER** fare far better; their hardcore-infused death metal whips the room into a frenzy and penultimate track *EF5* threatens to cave the roof in. Looking incredibly comfortable on a stage of this size – they played above a pub when last visiting Nottingham – they're justifying the buzz already surrounding their potential. With members of Conjurer and Bleed From Within in their ranks, **SYLOSIS** contain some of the best UK musicians around, and the level of carnage they bring to the East Midlands is indicative of the talent the death/metalcore bruisers now boast. Mainman Josh Middleton may be suffering from illness, but he's so visceral in his delivery it wouldn't have been noticed if gone unmentioned. Delivering an hour of furious bangers like *Stained Humanity* and a pulverising rendition of *I Sever*, Sylosis are given a hero's treatment by this sold-out venue, ending their UK tour on the biggest of highs.

ELLIOT LEAVER

BEN GIBSON

Myrkur: Amalie Bruun hits a high note at the Assembly Hall

Jonathan Hultén summons up the spirit of Louise Brooks

MYRKUR
JONATHAN HULTÉN
ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

A double dose of Scandinavian atmospherics from twin mavericks

JONATHAN HULTÉN HAS brought a little bit of the Scandinavian forest with him to North London. The former Tribulation guitarist turned ghost-folk solo artist has decked out the Assembly Hall stage like a grotto for his opening set on tonight's all-Scandinavian bill. He cuts a striking figure standing alone on the stage surrounded by arching branches and green and purple leaves, all black lace veils, flowing skirts and dramatic hand flourishes, looking like the wraith of a 1920s East European silent movie star.

Tonight, the Swede is channelling 2022's *The Forest Sessions*, an unearthly, alone-in-the-trees reimagining of his older songs. But despite his best efforts, he can't quite summon the enveloping atmosphere of that record – the acoustic guitar/keyboard/multi-tracked vocal set-up feels skeletal rather than spectral, not helped by distracting chatter at the bar. He's still a brilliant, singular figure, but the magic is just out of reach tonight.

Amalie Bruun, aka **MYRKUR**, played her first London gig nearly nine years ago, at Camden's The Underworld. She was a completely different artist then: one woman spitting out a wall of lo-fi black metal noise, offering a challenge to the tiresome gatekeepers who would deny her the right to exist. The ensuing decade has seen her evolve her original persona, adopting the raiment of Scandinavian folk-mother on 2020's *Folkesange* and, on last year's synthy, shapeshifting *Spine*, regal Scandi goth-queen.

Her headlining set leans heavily on the latter tonight, which is no bad thing. Backed by a three-piece band, she turns in versions of *Spine* standouts *Like Humans*, *Mothlike* and *My Blood Is Gold* that swell and echo, just different enough from their recorded counterparts to feel unique. The scattering of songs she does draw from her slim back catalogue – the shoegazey *Dybt i Skoven* from her otherwise intense debut album *M*, *The Serpent* and *Crown* from 2018's arty *Mareridt*, 2019's folky standalone single *Bonden Og Kragen* – are chosen to fit in with the sonic aesthetics.

She apologises at one point for not being talkative between songs, but she's a magnetic presence nonetheless, floating across the stage like a ghost. "Play something heavy," honks some buffoon at the back; instead, she brings out Jonathan Hultén for her keening version of the traditional folk song *House Carpenter*. It's a brilliant dove-tailing of styles that suggests a full-fledged collaboration wouldn't go amiss. She concludes the main set with a sparse version of *Folkesange* track *Leaves Of Yggdrasil*. It's a striking reminder of just how far her journey has brought her.

DAVE EVERLEY

DEREK BREMNER

Midnight have made New Cross their new 'hood

MIDNIGHT

CYCLONE / HIGH COMMAND / VACUOUS

NEW CROSS INN, LONDON

US blackened speed metal masters restart their South London riot

ARISING FROM THE fetid sewers of North London, **VACUOUS** are making a name for themselves with some of the nastiest, filthiest noise around. 2022's *Dreams Of Dysphoria* made waves in the underground both at home and overseas, and they have the live show to back it up. A rumbling wall of grotesque and monstrous riffs, this is the underground at its very best. These youngsters are at the vanguard of British death metal.

HIGH COMMAND live and die by the crunch. Their crossover thrashing is equal parts Exodus and Cro-Mags: all chunky and chugging riffs, bouncy mosh-friendly tempos and a high-energy delivery that is infectious. Furious and unflagging, the Massachusetts quintet have an infectious energy and are thoroughly convincing as a live act. It's headbanging , sword-wielding metallic fun for all with a bright future.

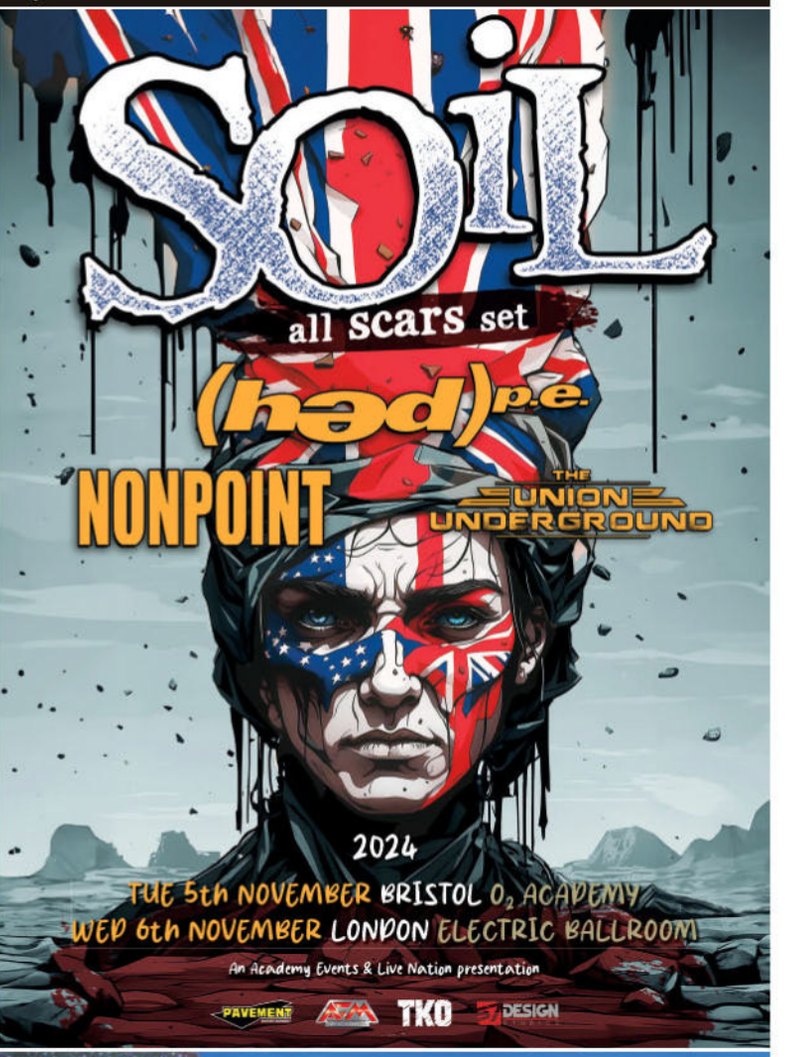
Belgian thrashers **CYCLONE** formed before any of the Big 4 or the Teutonic 3, although they never managed to make much of an impact, at least not in the UK. With one original and one early member, backed by a trio of enthusiastic younger ones, they are something of an unknown quantity for the crowd, but they're able to whip up a decent circle-pit full of kids half the age of the band.

Cleveland's metalpunk masters **MIDNIGHT** are back for what appears to be their annual visit to New Cross, and their behooded Venom-head speedballs are just the what the doctor ordered. In just 60 minutes, they blast through 19 slices of high-octane filth rock that are sleazier than the cast of *Love Island*, and just as addictive. Opening with *Vomit Queens* and *Lust Filth And Sleaze*, the power trio explode on to the tiny stage like executioners looking for some bloodsoaked overtime. *Fucking Speed And Darkness*, *Black Rock'n'Roll* and *Expect Total Hell* aren't so much songs as mission statements. With the venue rammed to the gills, there is no room for subtlety, just repeated metallic punky punches, presumably from an iron fist. *You Can't Stop Steel*? No, and frankly we wouldn't want to. See you next year!

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

JAKE OWENS

Academy Events present



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FIVE MINUTES WITH

HANNAH GREENWOOD

CREEPER

A classically trained pianist, violinist and pianist, Hannah is Creeper's secret weapon – and a lowkey comedian to boot

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

STEVE BRIGHT

How did you get into singing? What is your earliest singing memory?
"Well, I started off playing the violin – I actually got up to a Grade 8 [the highest grade in UK music exams]. Then I learnt the piano and part of the theory exam for that is singing. My piano teacher was also a vocal coach, so she asked if I'd ever considered singing and I thought I could give it a go. So I'm a classically trained vocalist. I applied to study it further, but they said my voice wasn't mature enough and to return in a year. But, by then, I wanted to do something more contemporary…"

How do you bring that classical training into Creeper?
"I was head chorister and lead soprano at my school, so I'm good at constructing all the choral harmonies. I essentially layer my vocals – those ridiculously high notes in *Cry To Heaven* aren't pitch-shifted, they're me! It works well, because Creeper is obviously very theatrical."

Are you a very theatrical person yourself?
"I'm a big musical theatre fan. I did quite a lot of theatre as a kid, classic stuff like *Grease*… I wish I'd kept up my acting. It's been nice amping up the theatrics for live shows. The backstage chaos reminds me of school plays – running backstage, fighting your way out of an outfit, get your make-up sorted, run back out…"

The wedding dress you've knocked out a few times for *Crickets* is lovely!
"Sadly that's long gone. We used to cover it in blood, so it got a bit mouldy."

What was it like when you had to fill in for your singer, Will Gould, in 2022 at Rise Fest?
"My biggest problem is talking to the crowd. I'm not scared of it, exactly… I'm just a bit of a joker when I'm nervous. It's a running joke in Creeper that I'm banned from making jokes onstage. So I tried desperately to not let that come out – then things started to go wrong. We started to have technical issues… so I had to fill the time with rambling. I think people find it endearing, luckily. But mine and Will's personalities onstage are really different – I love having the moments where it's just me and the crowd, but I like retreating and hiding behind my keyboard."

"WE USED TO COVER THE WEDDING DRESS IN BLOOD, SO IT GOT MOULDY"

Would you ever do solo stuff?
"Knowing me, if I ever did a solo thing it would turn into a stand-up routine with a few songs thrown in. I was working on some stuff a couple of years ago, but it's finding the time to do it. Creeper is my main focus, but I also work part-time when I'm not on tour."

Is it grounding, having a normal job alongside Creeper?
"I love being surrounded by musicians, but working with the NHS, you're just surrounded by people that don't know anything about that world. I'm out in the countryside, so when people find out, they ask if I 'play down at the local pub?' and I'm like, 'Not quite…'"

How's it out in the countryside?
"I've always been a proper country bumpkin – I love walks, I love clay pigeon shooting, I love horses. The dream for me is cuddling up with a cat to watch *Midsomer Murders*, but I'm always out on tour. We can't even have a fish. Can't even have those little sea monkey things that people had in the 90s."

Wait… are they alive?
"I read an article about how kids were really cruel to them. They were alive and kids never fed them. They kind of just looked like little floating worms, I never thought about it… We were kids, we didn't know! I asked my mum for some at the time, but she got me a Tamagotchi instead. When they got banned at school, my mum used to look after mine and my brother's Tamagotchis all day. Recently she was like, 'I cannot describe to you how much I hated it… I knew you would be distraught if I let them die, but they were constantly beeping and bleating and screaming at me.'"

Ah, the weight of parenthood.
"It was a labour of love, bless her."

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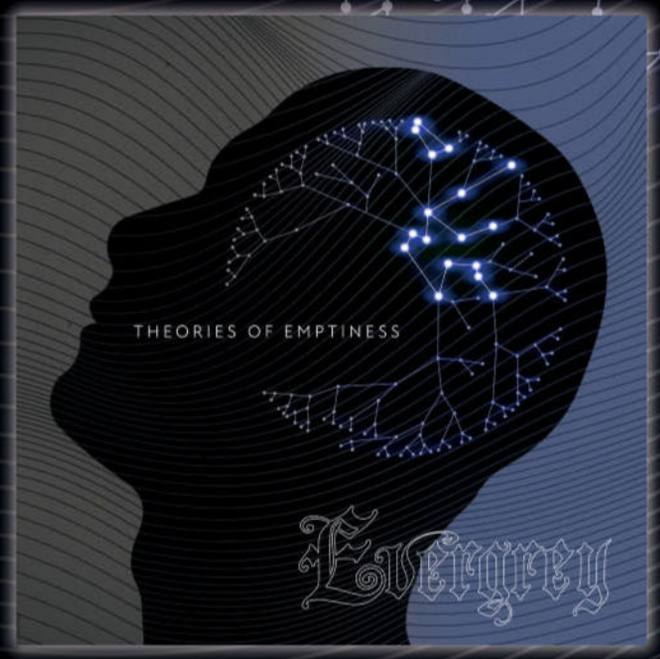

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